FIGHTING IN A WORLD ON FIRE

ANDREAS MALM

Adapted by
Jimmy Whipps,
Llewyn Whipps

THE NEXT GENERATION'S GUIDE TO PROTECTING THE CLIMATE AND SAVING OUR FUTURE

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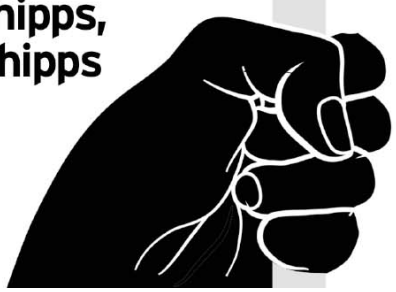

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OUR FUTURE

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FOREWORD

WHY ADAPT THIS BOOK FOR THE NEXT GENERATION?

We first read *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* in 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic was still a major force on the world, and the climate movement had, for all intents and purposes, lost the wind in its sails.

We'll admit, we were feeling pretty hopeless. But reading the book ignited a spark in us, both illuminating the size of the problem and showing us we *can* work to stop it, that we *must* work to stop it. We wanted to share it with everyone, which led us to create this version, geared toward youth activists and anyone who wants to take action to halt climate change.

Now, as we write these words, pandemic restrictions are lifting, and Russia's war in Ukraine is sending many countries scrambling for new sources of energy as sanctions on Russian oil and gas take hold. A heatwave rages in India and Pakistan, and deforestation of the Amazon rainforest is at a record high. We continue on a collision course with disaster, but the

climate movement shows signs of waking up. It's hard to know what will come next.

The point is that conditions are always changing. We are writing from the past. Whenever you pick this book up, we hope you read it with an eye to when it was written. That is, whatever has happened between when we write this and when you read this, we hope you use the ideas we've shared and the history we've traced to ask questions of the present you find yourself in. The story is never complete!

The question of which tactics are most useful can also never fully be answered in the moment, only with the passage of time. This book offers one perspective (and one that is often suppressed), but it is not the only one. No one can know what the future holds, what will actually work to shift minds and change possibilities—and anyone who says they know is lying. All we can do is keep our eyes and ears open, study the past, look to our own triumphs and failures, and keep trying—forging ahead with creativity, empathy, humility, and adaptability.

Whether this is new for you or you're already full of fire, we hope this book reminds you that the struggle for a better world has been going on for generations and generations. Stepping into it is stepping into a long tradition and a deep-seated community. We hope to see you in that community and in a future we can make possible by putting to work our unique perspectives, skills, determination, and love.

Jimmy Whipps and Llewyn Whipps
Portland, Oregon
May 2022

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM WITH BUSINESS-AS-USUAL

On the last day of negotiations, we geared up for our most daring action yet. We had been camping out in a shabby gymnasium in the eastern part of the city for a week. My friends and I had arrived there on a dilapidated bus—on the road, in the middle of the night, the exhaust pipe had fallen off—but when we spread out on the yard of the sports center we felt the rush of entering an alternative world. It was a place where business-as-usual had been suspended. A communal kitchen served vegan food. Assemblies—where the action planning and organizing took place—were open to anyone with something to say. During one workshop, a man from Bangladesh outlined the devastating consequences of rising sea levels for his country; at another, delegates from small island nations came to voice their distress as well as their support. My friends and I secured an audience with our environmental minister and urged her to ratchet up ambitions across the board. The science, after all, had been clear for a long time.

One day we poured out of the subway stations and onto a busy junction in the middle of the city and blocked the traffic with banners calling for

emissions to be slashed. Activists played guitars and violins while others danced; some juggled; some handed out sunflower seeds to angry motorists. We had no intention of confronting the police or anyone else; we'd rather get arrested than throw a bottle or a stone. The next day, we flooded a boulevard with an elaborate form of street theater. Dressed up as trees, flowers, and animals, we lay down on the street to be run over by a vehicle built of cardboard and wood to symbolize business-as-usual. Striding through the crowd, protesters in United Nations delegate costumes carried signs saying, "Blah-Blah-Blah," and did nothing.

And now it was the final day of the negotiations. Hired buses drove all five hundred of us close to the venue. On signal, we marched to the building and tried to prevent the delegates from leaving by using chains to lock ourselves to the gates and lying down on the ground, all the while chanting, "No more blah-blah-blah … Action now! No more blah-blah-blah … Action now!"

This happened in 1995. The scene was COP1, the very first annual UN climate summit, in Berlin. The delegates snuck out through a back door. Since then, total annual CO_2 emissions in the world have grown by some 60 percent. In the year of that summit, the combustion of fossil fuels pumped more than six gigatons of carbon into the atmosphere; in 2018, the figure passed ten. In the twenty-five years after those delegates left, more carbon was released from underground stocks than in the seventy-five years before the delegates met. Let that sink in.

A protest against climate change in Sydney, Australia, part of a worldwide Global Climate Strike led by students on March 15, 2019.

CO_2 and Fossil Fuels

Carbon dioxide, or CO_2, is one of the most important gases on Earth because plants and trees use it to produce food during photosynthesis. Since all humans and animals depend on plants for food, CO_2 is necessary for the survival of life on Earth. In the atmosphere, CO_2 also helps insulate the Earth through the greenhouse effect, whereby certain gases trap some of the sun's heat in the lower atmosphere. Without the greenhouse effect, the earth would be too cold for

life. But the more CO_2 we send into the atmosphere, the greater the greenhouse effect, and the more the planet heats up.

But what's the relationship between CO_2 and fossil fuels? CO_2 is one part carbon and two parts oxygen. During photosynthesis, plants break CO_2 into carbon and oxygen molecules, releasing the oxygen back into the atmosphere while storing the carbon in their cells. Anything that eats plants also stores carbon and continues to do so as long as it's alive. But when plants and animals die, the carbon they stored gets broken down as their bodies decompose. Often, decomposition returns it to the atmosphere as CO_2. But under the right conditions, dead matter ends up buried, under pressure and without oxygen. The high pressure and lack of oxygen eventually transforms it into more stable forms of carbon—the very coal, oil, and gas we mine today. (Contrary to what's suggested by the word "fossil," most of our fossil fuels in fact come from ancient plankton and plants, not dinosaurs. Plankton decomposes into oil and gas, while plants become coal.) If left underground, the carbon would be trapped there for millennia. But when we pull it up and burn it, it recombines with oxygen to once again form CO_2.

Some change in the levels of CO_2 in the atmosphere is natural. But by burning massive amounts of long-buried carbon, we're amplifying the greenhouse effect by flooding the atmosphere with *much* more CO2 than otherwise produced through the natural rhythms of our planet. This means the greenhouse effect gets stronger as more of the sun's heat is trapped in the lower atmosphere, and the planet gets too hot for all of us who currently live on it. The results, as we're seeing, are destabilizing: climate change, ocean acidification, and a continuous series of storms, disease outbreaks, die- offs, floods, and droughts.

There are many other heat-trapping greenhouse gases of concern (from methane to water vapor), but CO_2 puts us at the greatest risk of irreversible change. This is mainly because we are releasing a *lot* more CO_2 than any other gas, but also because CO_2 stays in the atmosphere for much longer than other gases.

Since COP1 in 1995, the US has set off a boom in fossil fuel extraction, once again becoming the world's top producer of oil and gas. Home to the largest network of pipelines, the United States has added 800,000 miles, which has only increased the pressure of the proverbial "hose" pouring ever more fuel on the climate fire. Germany, meanwhile, has continued to dig up nearly 200 million tons of brown coal—the dirtiest of all fossil fuels—every year. The open-pit mines expand continually, as forests and villages are torn down so the sooty open mines can stretch beyond the horizon and the giant excavators can shovel up more soft rock to be set on fire. Since COP1, my home country, Sweden, has initiated one of the largest infrastructure projects in its history: a massive "ring road" highway. Nothing extraordinary, just another highway. Coiling around Stockholm, it is designed to carry more cars spewing out ever more millions of tons of carbon. In April 1995, the month COP1 concluded, the atmospheric concentration of CO_2 stood at 363 parts per million (ppm). In April 2018, it

was higher than 410 ppm. (And as we write this, in April 2022, it is over 422 ppm.)

A cloud of smoke billows across Siberia as I write these words in the year 2020. It originates from wildfires of unprecedented size and ferocity within the Arctic Circle. For weeks, the flames have been sweeping through the area, scorching what should be the coldest forests on Earth and sending up plumes into one giant formation of soot. The cloud of soot is now larger than the land area of the European Union. Before the Arctic fires die back, huge swaths of the Amazon rainforest catch fire and turn to ash at a pace never registered before.

Fossil Fuel Extraction

From mining to drilling to mountaintop removal, there are many methods of extracting fossil fuels from the earth. The first method industrialists developed was *underground coal mining*, which involves excavating tunnels into coal deposits. As coal has become scarcer, the industry has developed new methods. In the United States, coal is now more often excavated through surface mining, of which there are two main types: *open-pit mining* involves blasting massive, open holes in the earth's surface, while *mountaintop removal* entails first scraping all the trees and vegetation off a mountain, then blowing up the rock and sifting through it for coal. Both methods have huge negative impacts on the land, water, and people nearby, whether it's in the United States, Germany, Australia, or China.

We've also seen a shift in how we drill for oil and gas. The easy methods to get oil and gas, often called "conventional methods," are being abandoned as those sources run out. We are now relying on more extreme methods such as hydraulic fracturing (fracking) and extracting oil from sands and shale. Both of these unconventional methods require massive amounts of energy, water, and chemicals just to obtain and refine the oil and gas. *Fracking* involves shooting a solution of water and chemicals deep into the earth to break up rocks and release natural gas. It has caused earthquakes in nearby communities, and contaminated drinking water with chemicals. *Tar sands extraction*, like mountaintop removal, first requires removing all the vegetation from the land. The tar sands beneath are then dug up and blasted with steam to separate the oil from the sand. Both fracking and tar sands extraction produce large amounts of greenhouse gases in the extraction process before they are even burned. Meanwhile, *offshore*

drilling (drilling at the bottom of the ocean's floor) is occurring in deeper and deeper waters, which presents greater risks for leaks and disasters.

But extraction is only the first part of the story. How does that crude oil and gas get from the well sites, on land and offshore, to the refineries? It is mainly through pipes and oil tankers. The system is extensive: the United States has about 200,000 miles of pipelines alone. Between pipelines, tankers, and storage facilities, fossil fuel infrastructure is prone to spill, leak, explode, and cause fires. Across the country's transportation and storage network, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) has recorded a yearly average of nearly three hundred incidents, fifty- five injuries, and thirteen fatalities over the past twenty years, totaling over $11 billion in damages. Even before it's burned, fossil fuel extraction can take a terrible toll on the environment and human health.

At the refineries, crude oil is heated, treated with chemicals, and separated into final products like gasoline, kerosene, and diesel. The process is extremely polluting and harmful to anyone who lives nearby. (America's largest refinery area, in Louisiana, is known as "Cancer Alley.") The oil industry tends to locate refineries in poorer communities and communities of color—a discriminatory strategy that activists call "environmental racism." People living in the refineries' vicinity have fought many battles to hold the industry accountable.

To say that the climate warning signals have been ignored by the ruling classes would be an understatement. If these classes ever had any sense, they have lost it all by now. They are not angered by the smell from blazing trees. They do not worry at the sight of islands sinking; they do not run from the roar of the approaching hurricanes; their fingers never need to touch the stalks from withered crops; their mouths do not become sticky and dry after a day with nothing to drink. To appeal to their reason and common sense would evidently be pointless. Their commitment to the endless accumulation of wealth, power, and possessions wins out every time. After the past three decades, there can be no doubt that the ruling classes are inherently incapable of responding to the climate catastrophe in any other way than by speeding it along. Of their own accord, propelled by their inner drive, they can do nothing but burn their way to the end—their end and ours.

And so we are still here. Stuck. We build our action camps. We cook our vegan food and hold our assemblies. We march, we block streets, we stage plays, we hand over lists of demands to leaders, we chain ourselves to vehicles, and we march the next day too. We are still perfectly, immaculately peaceful. There are more of us now, by orders of magnitude. A new pitch of desperation is in our voices; we talk of extinctions and watching our hopes for the future diminish. And still business continues very much as usual.

At what point do we sharpen our strategies and tactics? When do we conclude that the time has come to also try something different? When do we start physically attacking the things that devour our planet? When do we begin to destroy them with our own hands? Is there a good reason for having waited this long?

In the summer of 2017, the Gulf of Mexico stored a record amount of heat. Its surface waters had never been so warm. When the seasonal hurricanes began to gather, with the winds spinning and swirling up in spirals, they extracted some of that excess heat energy as fuel for their motion and power and rains. On September 18, the eighth hurricane of the season, Maria, suddenly and explosively intensified from a category 1 to a category 5 system and took on the shape, as satellites recorded, of a monstrous saw blade. It tore through the Caribbean island of Dominica (population: 72,000), mowing it down. The rainforests covering the hills were knocked down, the trees broken and thrown into the sea, the island sheared of its iconic greenery in the course of a few hours; sturdy buildings were blown away as if they were straw huts. Estimates of the share of houses either vanished or badly damaged ranged from 60 to 97 percent. Afterward, piles of debris—roofs, bricks, furniture, cables, sewage pipes, an entire nation's infrastructure—lay scattered over the island. One of those who lost his home was the prime minister of Dominica, Roosevelt Skerrit, who spoke at the UN's General Assembly four days after Maria's landfall.

Rarely has a head of state been so shell-shocked in an address to that gathering. Skerrit spoke of himself as coming straight from the front lines of a war. "We dug graves today in Dominica!" he exclaimed. "We buried loved ones yesterday and I am sure that as I return home tomorrow, we shall discover additional fatalities. Our homes are flattened! Our buildings are roofless! Our crops are uprooted! Where there was green there is now only dust and dirt." Aptly summing up the science, Skerrit explained to the world's congregated leaders that the heat in the ocean functions as fuel for brewing storms, super-charging them into weapons of mass destruction. The heat was not generated by Caribbean peoples. An island almost exclusively inhabited by descendants of slaves and a few remaining Indigenous people, Dominica remains impoverished, a world away from New York City or London. It is responsible for a level of fossil fuel combustion so tiny as to leave no trace on the planet. "The war has come to us!" Prime Minister Skerrit cried out, struggling to contain the pain. "We

are shouldering the consequences of the actions of others. Actions that endanger our very existence … and all for the enrichment of a few elsewhere.” He made a desperate plea to his audience at the UN that day in 2017. “We need action”—action, that is, to cut emissions of all greenhouse gases—“and we need it NOW!!” He probably knew his words would be brushed off as easily as all the pleas and warnings that came before.

The morning after Hurricane Maria in Dominica, September 19, 2017. Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit’s communications team took this photograph, and Skerrit spoke forcefully to the United Nations about the devastating effects of climate change on his country.

His war imagery was spot on. Like a precision-guided missile, Hurricane Maria departed Dominica and continued toward Puerto Rico, where the scenes were repeated, with mass flooding and mudslides, shattered towns and villages, and a horrible number of human deaths. The government put the death toll at sixty-four, but several independent research teams demonstrated that the real figure was somewhere between three thousand and six thousand. No such assessments were conducted for Dominica.

Lanchester's Paradox

Two weeks before Hurricane Maria, the *London Review of Books* pulled out essays on climate change from its archives and sent them to subscribers. The first was written by John Lanchester. It begins:

> It is strange and striking that climate change activists have not committed any acts of terrorism. After all, terrorism is for the individual by far the modern world's most effective form of political action, and climate change is an issue about which people feel just as strongly about as, say, animal rights. This is especially noticeable when you bear in mind the ease of things like blowing up petrol stations, or vandalising SUVs. In cities, SUVs are loathed by everyone except the people who drive them; and in a city the size of London, a few dozen people could in a short space of time make the ownership of these cars effectively impossible, just by running keys down the side of them, at a cost to the owner of several thousand pounds a time. Say fifty people vandalizing four cars each and every night for a month: six thousand trashed SUVs in a month and [they] would soon be disappearing from our streets. So why don't these things happen? Is it because the people who feel strongly about climate change are simply too nice, too educated, to do anything of the sort? (But terrorists are often highly educated.) Or is it that even the people who feel most strongly about climate change, on some level, can't quite bring themselves to believe in it?

Bear in mind that those words were written in 2007, ten years before the hurricane season of 2017. They were written before floods buried a fifth of Pakistan under water and ruined the lives of some 20 million people; before Cyclone Nargis killed a couple of hundred thousand in Myanmar; before Typhoon Haiyan killed more than six thousand in the Philippines; before Cyclone Idai devastated central Mozambique; before Hurricanes Matthew, Isaac, Irma, Dorian; before the droughts settled on Central America and took hold of Iran and Afghanistan; before mudslides killed more than a thousand in the capital of Sierra Leone; before monsoon-like rains washed away hundreds of villages in Peru; before the thermometer regularly reached levels barely endurable by the human body in the Persian Gulf; before uncountable other disasters—some reaching deep into the global North: heatwaves roasting Europe for two consecutive summers, the worst wildfires in the history of California and many other western states—all formed in the cauldron of an overheated world.

And yet, the same hands-off protest tactics prevail in the climate resistance movements. That is puzzling for at least five reasons:

1. **The magnitude of what is at stake.** Close to all living beings on the planet face a very uncertain future if CO_2 emissions continue at current

rates.

2. **The sheer number of targets in industrialized countries.** A gas station or an SUV is rarely more than a stone's throw away—not a possibility, crucially, in many countries like Dominica, where emission sources can be few and far between.
3. **It is easy to take some of these targets out of service.** Neither complicated instruments nor a high level of technical expertise is needed.
4. **Almost everyone today is aware of the crisis, and how bad things are becoming**. Almost all countries are experiencing the shock of heatwaves and natural disasters, which are ever more clearly linked to climate change.
5. **Climate change makes the world more unjust.** People in the poorest countries who had little to do with creating carbon emissions now face the burden of severe weather and rising seas.

Considering all these reasons, it is strange and striking that the kind of actions described by Lanchester have not been taken. It is a paradox: call it simply "Lanchester's Paradox." The question is, why aren't we taking stronger measures against what is, without doubt, a force that is hurting and destroying the planet and all its inhabitants? Why are we so passive when we know so much?

Emissions continue to rise, despite all the talk from world leaders. Could it be their talk makes it only seem that we're taking real action against climate catastrophe? That may be part of the answer to Lanchester's Paradox. Keep it in mind; we will return to the paradox later.

Rulers vs. the Rest of Us

Just who are these elites we're talking about? They're politicians, but they're also owners and executives of large companies in various industries, Wall Street investors, large-scale land developers, and tech innovators. They're people who have enough money to sway political campaigns, buy news outlets, and keep land and water privatized and inaccessible for everyone but themselves. These are the elites, the ruling classes. They own much of what we all rely on for survival, and use their wealth to essentially make decisions for the rest of us. If a law gets in their way, they can usually pay their way out of it, shielding themselves from any repercussions.

One way to think about global inequality is to split the richer countries from the poorer ones and look at the difference in their consumption levels. (You guessed it: the rich countries consume many more resources than the poorer countries do, and so we understand that the people who live in rich countries certainly have a greater general responsibility for countering climate change than do those in poorer countries.) This method certainly has its uses, as we will see. But another way to gauge inequality is to look at the power and class differences among individual people, wherever they live. Even in the poorest countries, there are still rich people living off others' poverty, with the power to make or ignore laws. And although we need to acknowledge the difference in key economic indicators between being a typical person in the US and a typical person in Dominica, both probably have more in common with each other than they do with elites in either country.

But it is the ruling classes that are heavily invested in maintaining the systems that keep the money flowing into their bank accounts. In their eyes, the fossil fuel industry, with its many opportunities for profit, must be protected. Addressing climate chaos is not a priority for them, because that would threaten the massive amount of wealth they can acquire in the short term. The problem is that the rest of us have to live with their bad choices.

Thinking about the ruling classes can feel overwhelming, but it also means we can start taking action anywhere: whether we're fighting a coal mine, a freeway expansion, a deforestation project, or a toxic waste dump, we are in solidarity with others doing the same work all around the world.

The Three Cycles of the Climate Movement in the Global North

While people were warning about climate change way back in the 1970s, what we call the climate movement didn't really pick up speed until the mid-2000s. Since then, actions in the global North have generally taken place in three cycles. Each successive cycle took lessons from the one that came before, and actions have grown in scale. The first cycle, centered in northern Europe, took off from organizing that had been building since the 1990s, exploding into mass protests between 2006 and 2009. In the UK, activists organized the first climate camps: tent cities serving as sites for festivals celebrating lifestyles not based on the burning of fossil fuels, as places of learning, and as bases for mass action against a nearby point

source of emissions—an airport, a coal-fired power plant, a financial district, and so on. A group called Plane Stupid occupied taxiways and leapt onto runways at airports around the country.

Global North and South

Contrary to what many assume, the terms “global North” and “global South” don’t actually refer to the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. They’re labels to describe the divide between wealthy countries and poorer countries. Today, the global North encompasses most of Europe and North America, as well as countries that aren’t technically located in this region: Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. The global South, on the other hand, includes most countries in Central and South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. In the past, people have used more biased terms for this divide: “civilized/uncivilized,” “developed/developing/undeveloped,” and “first/second/third world.” But those terms create the notion that countries in the global South have something inherently wrong with them, and are just trying to catch up to the global North. They work on the false assumption that everyone *can* live as the global North does; however, as this book argues, we need societies that aren’t based on the massive fossil fuel consumption of the global North! And, importantly, these terms also mask the reason that the North and South became so unequal in the first place.

So why *do* these global inequalities exist? We have to look at the destructive influence of colonization. From the sixteenth century until today, countries in what we now call the global North have colonized, plundered the resources of, and committed genocide in countries that later constituted the global South. After being colonized, many countries in Asia, Africa, and Central and South America fought long and hard-won battles to assert their independence. But even to this day, many of their resources are owned and controlled by countries and corporations in the global North. Rather than being “undeveloped” or “uncivilized,” these countries are being actively suppressed.

For activists, people in the global South have important lessons to offer about how to maintain struggles over many generations, as well as creative ways to keep fighting in the face of massive oppression and danger.

In Denmark, Sweden, and Germany, the fledgling movement went into high gear during the preparations for the 2009 COP15 in Copenhagen. Before COP15, we were expecting the negotiation of a comprehensive

climate agreement. To increase pressure on summit delegates, we brought one hundred thousand people to the streets for a daylong march to the venue in Copenhagen. In addition, fifty thousand participated in the “People’s Climate Summit,” held separately in a large venue. Several thousands were part of blockades and other actions. But all this action yielded less than zero. COP15 ended with the delegates from the US and its allies killing the very idea of mandatory emissions cuts. Meanwhile, economic fallout from the 2007–8 financial crash took the energy out of the British activists. The absolute failure of COP15 brought an end to the first climate movement of the twenty-first century.

What’s the COP?

COP, which stands for Conference of the Parties, is the shorthand name for the annual United Nations Climate Conference. It is the supreme decision-making body for issues regarding climate change, and all UN member states are participants. The Paris Climate Agreement, the most comprehensive global climate plan to date, came out of COP21 in 2015.

A second cycle began in 2011, this time in the United States. After Barack Obama failed to push through the promised cap-and-trade legislation at home, and delivered a mortal blow to COP15, a very frustrated movement left the halls of policy-making and took to the streets, launching a sustained campaign of civil disobedience. It focused on Keystone XL, a proposed pipeline for transporting oil from the tar sands of Canada to the refineries on the US Gulf Coast. The project required the approval of Obama, who was confronted with some real “people power”: in August 2011, more than a thousand were arrested during a week-long sit-in outside the White House. Tens of thousands came back to encircle it with a human chain and lock themselves with plastic ties to its fences. At the same

time, activists built a widespread campaign for financial divestment, convincing universities, churches, and other institutions to sell off their stocks in oil, gas, and coal companies as a way to strip the fossil fuel companies of their legitimacy and set their downfall in motion.

Spurred on by Hurricane Sandy, the devastating storm that struck in 2012, New York City beat the record from Copenhagen with 400,000 people hitting the streets in the People's Climate March in September 2014, the largest rally to date, and the tide seemed to be turning. The next year, Obama finally rejected Keystone XL. The last months of his presidency were marked by another high point of mobilization when the Oceti Sakowin, or Great Sioux, Nation drew supporters to a camp at Standing Rock in protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline. As with the struggle against Keystone XL and dozens of other pipeline projects in North America, Native activists took the lead of a movement that drew in tens of thousands of previously non-politicized people. And then Donald Trump came to power. During his first week in the White House, he announced that both pipelines would be constructed at maximum speed. And thus the momentum behind that cycle of climate activism abruptly ended.

An encampment at Standing Rock, April 4, 2016.

But, of course, the climate crisis itself never relented. In the summer of 2018, a heat dome settled over the European continent, withheld the clouds for months on end, and ignited firestorms of unprecedented intensity; in Sweden, military jets were called in to bomb the fires (dropping not water bombs, but actual explosives). The whole country seemed to shrivel. Toward the end of that summer, a fifteen-year-old girl, Greta Thunberg, rode her bike to the Swedish parliament. She sat down on the sidewalk and declared a school strike for the climate. Greta's defiant example—one young person, with life on a heating planet ahead of her, set against the complacence and the impassable walls of an entire political system—touched a nerve for her generation. Children and youth began to walk out of their schools on Fridays. Waves of school strikes, known as "Fridays for Future," rolled across western Europe and other parts of the world, reaching a peak on March 15, 2019, when one and a half million students struck and marched in one of the largest coordinated youth protest in history.

A few weeks later, Extinction Rebellion (XR), another movement springing from the European heat dome of 2018, shut down much of central London as thousands of activists seized squares and bridges and slowly let themselves be dragged away by police. It was the largest civil disobedience action the UK had seen in decades, and it unfolded without a single incident of violence. This was the crest of the third cycle of the twenty-first-century climate movement, and XR was at the center of it. Copycat actions of the London action appeared on streets from New York to Sydney. And for its logo, XR had hit on a symbol as visually striking and easily replicable as the peace sign: it is a stylized hourglass, representing time running out, within a circle suggestive of the globe.

An Extinction Rebellion protest in London, November 17, 2018. The sign shows the group's logo, an hourglass running out of time.

In early September 2019, I joined an XR action in my hometown of Malmö, Sweden. The hourglass banners fluttered in the morning breeze from the sea (which, according to a newly released report, will drown much of the town later this very century if fossil fuel emissions aren't reduced). Signs said "Act Now" and "No More Empty Words." Bands of activists marched between intersections and blocked them for a few minutes, while taking off their clothes and pretending to swim in the rising waters. Some handed out snacks to soothe drivers irritated by the road closure. In October —the waves of mobilization now crashing like waves against a seawall— XR seized several intersections in central Berlin: some activists were dressed as penguins, tigers, bears; some juggled; some passed around vegan soup. It might have looked very similar to the actions around COP1 (1995 in Berlin), except for one thing: the number of people.

In politics, of course, numbers are everything. One worker staying home is just a loafer, one thousand are a strike; one Greta is just a student in Stockholm, one million students are a force to reckon with. The tents and picnics disrupting the flow of traffic in Berlin in late 2019 counted several thousands of participants, not hundreds. Undergoing the most explosive growth, XR claimed to have 485 affiliates across the world. The XR

“Autumn Uprising” began with the rising sun in Sydney and moved on to North American and European cities, where the same hourglasses, slogans, and disruptive actions moved into the spotlight in northern town centers.

The movement’s growth continued as the Fridays for Future protests reached a new peak in late September 2019: now it was four million out one Friday, two million again the next, with protests registered in 4,500 locations on all continents including Antarctica (where climate researchers laid down tools). The scale of the protests varied from one young woman in Minsk, Belarus, striking on her own, to fifty thousand children in school uniforms marching through Angola’s capital, Luanda. Students in the low-lying island nation of Kiribati chanted, “We are not sinking, we are fighting.” But the epicenter of mobilization was actually in Germany, home to more than a third of all strikers in the world on September 20, a fair share of them adults, with the blessing of their unions.

THERE IS NO PLANE
MAKE COOL AGAIN
LISTEN OUR PLANET IS DYING
지구가 죽고 있다
우리가 원하는 건 공감 아닌
Gov't grade in Climate Action- F
정부의 기후위기 대응점수 빵점
기후를 위한 결석 시위 School Strike 4 Climate

A School Strike for Climate in South Korea.

In parts of the global North, the movement now appeared to have evolved into a mass phenomenon. And nothing indicated peak mobilization

just yet. We saw signs of potential for continued growth, the cycle perhaps swinging even higher, simply because the climate crisis itself followed that trajectory. Neither would die away, it appeared.

Fridays for Future

Fridays for Future is a youth- led climate strike movement. Its goal is to put pressure on governing bodies around the world to pay attention to climate science and immediately reduce the amount of fossil fuels we extract, refine, and burn. Why? So that we can have a livable future.

Fridays for Future began in 2018 when fifteen-year-old Greta Thunberg, drawing on the inspiration of earlier strikes, skipped school, went alone to the Swedish parliament, and held up a sign that read “Skolstrejk för Klimatet” (School Strike for Climate). Although she is often portrayed as a lone schoolgirl, the power of her action lies in the fact that, after that initial protest, she *wasn’t* alone. Her voice was amplified, informed, and combined with committed youth activists around the world, especially those in the global South.

Just over a year later, in September 2019, the largest climate strike and protest the world has ever seen took place in 150 countries, involving around four million people. While the COVID-19 pandemic halted the movement’s momentum, Fridays for Future continues to organize online, and has started to reemerge in the streets. Look out for climate strikes to come at fridaysforfuture.org!

For the first time, the climate movement had become the single most dynamic social movement in the global North, known for its youthful, joyful, exuberant, respectful, orderly mass actions. But we also saw a darker undertone to the events: a simmering anger. Greta Thunberg personified it. Her silhouette hovered above millions of young people as a sign of the intergenerational injustice at the heart of the climate breakdown. She was mercilessly blunt when scolding world leaders for their passivity. “If emissions have to stop, then we must stop the emissions,” she would say, with uncompromising logic, but “no one is acting as if we [are] in a crisis.” She went on a permanent tour through Fridays for Future demonstrations,

XR blockades, the beech and oak groves of Hambach—a shred of an old-growth forest surrounded by a brown coal mine in northern Germany, whose owners wanted the forest chopped down—and the lawn of the White House.

At one meeting on climate in September 2019, at the UN headquarters in New York City, she struggled to hold back tears of rage: “How dare you! You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I’m one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying,” she said, denouncing her audience for continuing to talk only about money and economic growth, and finishing on a note even more ominous than usual: “Young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us I say we will never forgive you—change is coming, whether you like it or not.”

Greta Thunberg outside the Swedish parliament building, August 2018. Her sign reads, “School strike for climate.”

Some commentators noted the shift in tone. Back home in Sweden, one of them warned that should the millions on the streets pleading for their future be let down once again, “a fury such as the world has never before seen will be unleashed.”

Greta Thunberg’s Speech to the United Nations, September 2019

My message is that we’ll be watching you.

This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet, you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!

You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words, and yet I’m one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairytales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!

For more than thirty years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you’re doing enough when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight.

You say you hear us and that you understand the urgency, but no matter how sad and angry I am, I do not want to believe that. Because if you really understood the situation and still kept on failing to act, then you would be evil and that I refuse to believe.

The popular idea of cutting our emissions in half in ten years only gives us a 50 percent chance of staying below 1.5 degrees and the risk of setting off irreversible chain reactions beyond human control.

Fifty percent may be acceptable to you, but those numbers do not include tipping points, most feedback loops, additional warming hidden by toxic air pollution, or the aspects of equity and climate justice.

They also rely on my generation sucking hundreds of billions of tons of your CO_2 out of the air with technologies that barely exist.

So a 50 percent risk is simply not acceptable to us, we who have to live with the consequences …

How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just “business as usual” and some technical solutions? With today’s emissions levels, that remaining CO_2 budget will be entirely gone within less than eight and a half years.

There will not be any solutions or plans presented in line with these figures here today, because these numbers are too uncomfortable, and you are still not mature enough to tell it like it is.

You are failing us, but the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you, and if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.

We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up, and change is coming, whether you like it or not.

Thank you.

What Do We Do if People in Power Don't Listen to Our Protests?

All three cycles of the climate movement in the global North in the twenty-first century have grown out of an insight, more and more widely shared: the ruling classes really will not be talked into action. They are not open to persuasion; the louder the sirens wail, the more they accelerate climate disaster—meaning more flooding, drought, famine, crop failure, ocean death, and so on. It is now clear to everyone that change will have to be forced upon them. The climate movement must learn to disrupt business-as-usual.

To this end, the movement has developed an impressive set of actions: blockades, occupations, sitins, divestments, school strikes, climate camps, and the shutdown of city centers. Later cycles have built on and learned from prior ones. Toward the end of the second cycle, much inspired by the North American struggles against pipelines, the German movement reinvented the climate camp formula and brought it to a higher level of mass defiance: Ende Gelände, meaning roughly "Here and No Further," was born.

What Is Divestment?

With regard to the climate movement, “divestment” refers to the process of people and organizations terminating any financial dealings they have with fossil fuel companies and the banks that support them. Just as we might use banks to store our savings and investments, large institutions (such as universities, churches, city funds, and banks themselves) put their money in stock portfolios—portfolios that often include fossil fuel companies. The divestment movement calls on institutions to cut their ties with these stock portfolios and other investments in fossil fuel companies. If done on a large scale, divestment not only removes funds, damaging the companies’ bottom line, but can turn public opinion against them. Eventually, if divestment leaves fossil fuel companies with no public goodwill and no funding sources, it could even become impossible for them to operate.

At Ende Gelände, activists pitch their tents around a central area of circus tents and kitchens. They undergo trainings in ways to successfully make democratic decisions during protests; then they dress up in thin white coveralls and set out for a nearby brown coal mine. Approaching the target from several directions, in brigade-like columns, or “fingers,” they excel in breaking through police cordons with the sheer mass of their bodies, running past outwitted guards, making their way through the water cannons and fences until they reach the open pits of the coal mine. There they slide down into the dusty craters and climb the giant machines, the dozers and scrapers and excavators—the towering ships slowly breaking their way through the earth—and some lie down on the railroad tracks that ferry the coal to the furnaces.

As a result, production at the mine can be shut off for days. No fuel can be dug up and burned when the activists hold the premises. Arguably leading the most advanced stage of the climate struggle in Europe, Ende Gelände spanned all three cycles and grew year after year. In the summer of 2019, six thousand people closed the largest point source of emissions in

Germany; the activists were backed up by several thousands more in the camp, and some forty thousand in a Fridays for Future demonstration. By that time, Ende Gelände had forced the issue of brown coal to the top of the agenda and prompted a national commission to set a date for phasing it out—that date eventually announced as 2038. That means another two decades of churning out the dirty coal. Therefore, Ende Gelände promised to continue marching, and to inspire copycat camps around Europe; in 2019, dozens of climate camps sprang up.

Ende Gelände activists take part in the action in Lützerath against the Garzweiler II open pit coal mine, October 31, 2021.

Thus the climate resistance cycles have not returned to square one, but rather have grown, like the climate crisis itself. The American and European sections of the climate movement have learned from each other—divestment coming to UK university campuses, Greta Thunberg sailing to New York—and groups have accumulated a wealth of experiences. These include some “small wins”—a gas pipeline canceled here, a coal plant scrapped there—and some big losses, both of which serve to educate the movement about what works, and fuel a growing number of participants with hope and anger.

But so far, the movement has mostly avoided one type of action: physical force, whether offensive or defensive. Anything that could be classified as violence has been studiously avoided, with remarkable discipline. Even when, for example, we were being beaten and pepper-sprayed by police on railroad tracks leading into a fracking field, no one threw a single stone. Someone fainted, others screamed in pain. After such an assault, other types of crowds would surely have fought back. But the climate movement would not. For the most part, the climate movement would not even engage in property destruction. In another action, we blocked the entrance to a gas terminal with our bodies for a day, but pledged not to damage machines or infrastructure.

Overall, this approach of strict nonviolence has served the movement well, by giving it a many well-known tactical advantages. If it had deployed more militant tactics from the start—donning masks, smashing windows, burning barricades, fighting it out with the cops—it never would have attracted the numbers it has.

A commitment to being peaceful lowers the bar for joining an action by lowering risk. By being beaten up on the railroad tracks, we earned the sympathy of the press, for example: no one could smear us as terrorists or the like. Had some of us at the gas terminal started hacking at the fences or used slingshots against the trucks, the scene would have descended into chaos. We would have been captured by police and herded off to jail; I could not have brought my two kids to the site and played with them for hours. Submitting to the guidelines of the group's leadership and conducting an action according to plan—those are virtues, very real strengths of a movement. The determination of a group to build up its challenge to business-as-usual by means of ever bigger, bolder mass actions of this kind cannot be called into question: this is the main way forward. Let a hundred Ende Gelände camps bloom, and the fossil machine might find itself under some real pressure.

What can be questioned, however, is something else. Will absolute nonviolence be the *only* way, the only admissible tactic in the struggle to abolish fossil fuels? Can we be sure that it will be enough to defeat this enemy? The question can be asked in a different way. Imagine that the mass mobilizations of the third cycle become impossible to ignore. In this scenario, the ruling classes feel themselves under such heat—perhaps their hearts even melting somewhat at the sight of all these kids with handwritten

signs—that their stubborn resistance to change softens. New politicians are voted into office, notably from the green parties in Europe, who live up to their election promises. The pressure is kept up from below. Moratoriums on fresh fossil fuel infrastructure are passed into law. Germany implements an immediate phase-out of coal production, the Netherlands likewise for gas, Norway for oil, the US for all of the above; legislation and planning are put in place for cutting emissions by at least 10 percent annually going forward; plant-based diets are promoted, bans on fossil fuels are introduced. The movement should be given the chance to see if this is possible.

Tactics and Strategy

In protest movements, and social movements generally, goals, strategies, and tactics work together. How so? A *goal* is a general statement to concisely explain what you want to see in the world. A *strategy* is how you plan to accomplish your goal in concrete terms. A *tactic*, then, is a specific action, technique, or tool used to accomplish your strategy.

An example: Our goal is to get Candidate X elected to city council. One strategy to accomplish that goal is to contact every voter in the district. A tactic used to accomplish that strategy is to organize volunteers into door-knocking teams, providing them with specific addresses and times to canvas.

Or another example: A goal is for our country to reduce fossil fuel use by 90 percent in five years. A strategy to accomplish that goal is to create coordinated disruptions to daily life in order to call the nation's attention to the problem of continued fossil fuel use. A tactic might be to organize nationwide high school groups to blockade key transportation routes used by cars to enter cities.

But imagine a different scenario: a few years down the road, the kids of the Greta Thunberg generation and the rest of us wake up one morning and realize that business-as-usual still prevails, regardless of all the strikes, the science, the pleas, the millions with their colorful banners and outfits. It's certainly not beyond the realm of possibility. Imagine the greasy wheels

rolling as fast as ever. What do we do then? Do we say that we've done what we could, tried our best and failed? Do we conclude that the only thing left is learning to die as best we can—a position already taken by some—and slide down the slippery slope into three, four, eight degrees of heating?

Or is there another phase beyond peaceful protest?

Business-as-UsualContinues

Meanwhile, in our capitalist world economy, which is continuing its business even as the climate movement grows larger and larger, money is flowing into the construction of fresh fossil fuel projects. In May 2019, just weeks after the XR "Spring Uprising" in London, the International Energy Agency (IEA) released its annual report on investment trends in the world of energy. Capitalists knew what sources to bank on.

Two-thirds of the money placed in projects for generating energy in the year 2018 went to oil, gas, and coal—that is, to additional facilities for extracting and combusting those fuels, on top of what already spanned the globe—while less than one-third of money for energy projects went to wind and solar. In fact, global investment in renewable energy edged downward by 1 percent. Investment in coal, on the other hand, turned upward for the first time since 2012, by 2 percent—that is, investments in a brand-new coal supply not only continued but increased, although not by as great a margin as investments in oil and gas. And for the third consecutive year, the amount of money flowing into infrastructure for drilling and pumping grew by 6 percent. That means, year after year, 6 percent more capital was sunk into fresh drills, wells, rigs, and other infrastructure; investment in exploration to find new sources of fossil fuel was projected to shoot up by 18 percent in 2019. The fossil fuel fire reignited itself anew.

Defining Capitalism and Fossil Capital

In the most basic sense, capitalism is an economic system based on the accumulation of profit, or capital. Capitalism emphasizes competition, which demands that businesses constantly try to produce and sell more and more. One of the predictable outcomes of this is economic inequality, with land gobbled up for resource extraction, people exploited for cheap labor, and consumption always encouraged over moderation. The cheaper you can produce something, the more profit you make. A business can become even more profitable by either expanding and selling more of its product or withholding that product to create a sense of scarcity and raise prices. Profit is the goal of capitalism, and it drives people working within the system to act according to its logic. Some limits and regulations have been placed on capitalism, varying from one country to another: for example, generations of workers, and others harmed by it, have come together to fight back against the profit-above-all system. Things such as child labor laws, the eight- hour day, overtime pay, the weekend, and environmental regulations on companies were the result of hard-fought battles.

But those profiting the most from capitalism fight back against limits and regulations placed upon them. They use their wealth and power to control the levers of government, and the system continues to benefit them. Anything that reduces labor costs, speeds up production, or smooths the transportation of goods across the world must be pursued. This is where fossil fuels come into play.

Coal started being used as a fuel source in the late 1700s. Although wind power and water power were cheaper, coal quickly became the main power source for the Industrial Revolution, a period in history when capitalism and factories were just taking hold. Coal was perfect for capitalism because it could be transported anywhere (unlike water for a waterwheel), and as factories grew, they could simply buy more coal and increase production. Coal was also used to create more concentrated power, pushing machinery—and the people working it—to run faster. Thus the rise of coal, and later other fossil fuels, cemented into the world's psyche the idea that we need areas of extraction, or "sacrifice zones," to fuel production and consumption elsewhere.

Fossil fuels and modern capitalism rose to new heights together, and it is hard to imagine one without the other. Even with the rise in renewable energy and electric vehicles, capitalists are committed to the continued use of cheap power provided by fossil fuels. How could they not be? The profits are astounding!

Proponents of capitalism say we should expect the all-knowing market to regulate good and bad ideas: if it's a good idea, then people will put their money where their mouth is, choose right over wrong, and stop the harm caused by burning fossil fuels. But this has not happened. Instead we have the marketing of "green" alternatives—such as cloth grocery bags, LED light bulbs, and metal straws—which can be seen as an attempt at changing our habits from *within*

capitalism. But in spite of all the “green” products for sale, our capitalist system continues to prioritize profit over health, ethics, and livability. The same companies posting about Earth Day on social media are investing in oil pipelines. Another day goes by and nothing substantial changes … unless we force it to!

The IEA saw glittering treasures ahead: ExxonMobil expected a profit margin of at least 30 percent from its deep-water fields off the coast of Brazil and Guyana. The financial picture for this line of business remained as bright as ever. The gas boom roared on, which called for new pipelines. The very productive Permian Basin in Texas is the center of this development, but the steel snakes darted through the grass on other continents as well. Nowhere on the horizon of ongoing investments could be seen a transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy (despite renewables being “consistently cheaper,” as noted by the billionaire’s rag *Forbes*).

The IEA had enough awareness to notice “a growing mismatch between current trends and the paths to meeting” the goals of maximum 1.5°C or even 2°C of global heating. Put differently, the capitalist world economy operates with and in spite of a fundamental disconnect between the sense and science of a planet on fire, and all the desires and pledges to cool it down. And the disconnect was widening. CO_2 emissions continued to grow.

Just in time for the XR “Autumn Uprising” in 2019, the *Guardian* newspaper in the UK published a series of articles revealing just how much the fossil fuel industry was prepared to burn. The world’s fifty largest oil companies were poised to flood markets with more of their supply. Of that group, the two companies with the most aggressive plans were Shell and ExxonMobil, which planned to increase production by 38 and 35 percent, respectively, until 2030. One rung down from them was BP, which foresaw an increase of 20 percent, and France’s Total, expecting a rise of 12 percent. All of this new fossil fuel development was deeply intertwined with global financial capital: as the *Guardian* also revealed, the three largest asset managers in the world, together handling assets worth more than China’s entire economic output, continued to pour money into oil, gas, and coal at an accelerating pace. Nothing could be more opposed to the guidance of science or the needs of people and the planet.

These trends aren’t new, either. Also in 2019, a team of scientists from California and Beijing headed by Dan Tong published an overview of

global investments in oil and gas in the journal *Nature*. Dr. Tong and his team began by repeating the UN's official goal to stay below 1.5°C or 2°C, but then brought up the dirty little secret undermining that goal: "Recent decades have witnessed an unprecedented expansion of historically long-lived, fossil-fuel-based energy infrastructure." In fact, just about half of all drills, wells, terminals, and the like were commissioned and built after 2004, the year of COP10. This reveals a serious mismatch between climate goals and reality.

Through its three cycles so far, the climate movement has done nothing to halt the steady progress of fossil fuel development. The developers and investors go on without concern. Primarily, this is because the nations making the laws have shielded fossil capital (a term for the money invested in the fossil fuel economy) and quickly given developers everything they need to expand production. What is more, private capitalists and capitalist nations are often impossible to tell apart, with nations behaving and investing just like private citizens—putting money into expanding pipelines and fracking fields and guarding their investments with everything they have.

Brick by brick, this furnace builds on itself. Once a company or nation has constructed a coal-fired power plant or a pipeline or other component, it will not want to dismantle it. Demolition on the day after completion would be a financial disaster. It takes a lot of money to get something like a deep-water field to pump up oil, and some time must pass before the investment pays off. Once the profits have come gushing in, the owner will have a keen and ongoing interest in keeping the unit at work for as long as possible, to make as much money as possible. Discarding it is not impossible; it would merely cause losses in money and capital. For this reason—an economic, not technical, matter—a structure that generates power from fossil fuels is expected to have a lifetime of around forty years. Therefore, a plant or a pipeline built in 2020 should, from the standpoint of the investor, preferably still be in operation by 2060. Coal-fired power plants often run even longer, for sixty years or more. The world's largest coal exporter, Australia, continues to open mines, notably the giant Adani mine in Queensland, to feed newborn plants in India and elsewhere. And they have plans in the works to allow another company to build a mine four times as large. Plans like this crisscross the entire globe. Thus scientists can calculate the "committed emissions," defined as the CO_2 emissions to come if all

existing plants and fossil fuel infrastructure operate to the end of their expected lifetime. The more capital poured into this field, the greater the committed emissions. This strengthens the interest in defending business-as-usual, to ensure profits. And as greater profits are raked in, investors have more money to reinvest in more and bigger projects … and on and on as the world burns hotter.

How much committed emissions are we talking about exactly? Dr. Tong and his team estimated that committed emissions from already-running power plants—not counting extraction, transportation, or deforestation—would be enough to take the world beyond 1.5°C. When we add emissions from proposed plants to that estimate, the world has no chance of staying below 2°C. Another study from 2018 concluded that committed emissions from operating plants would surpass the limit for both temperature targets, 1.5°C and 2°C. Yet another study found that existing and planned coal infrastructure alone would crash the 2°C budget. Regardless of which study you refer to, this outcome, as the saying goes, is in the pipeline.

Why Is 2 Degrees Celsius the Limit Set by Scientists?

When we talk about degrees of warming, we mean the amount that the global temperature has risen, an average across place and time, since humans started burning fossil fuels in large quantities. However, most of the data starts from 1880, because that is when we started being able to measure temperature accurately.

Today, as of this writing, the temperature has already risen about 1.1 degrees Celsius. While disasters are already happening, and will increase as the world warms, climate scientists agree that 2 degrees Celsius of warming is about the limit that most plants and animals can withstand. It is a limit we must stay under if we want life to go on in a more or less recognizable way. Two degrees may not sound like a lot, but we have to remember it's just an average. Some areas will warm more quickly (the North and South Poles have already risen 2 degrees), and intense heat waves—spiking well above the general warming rate—will become regular events. And as

temperatures rise, the planet's systems, which work together in a coordinated dance to make life possible for all creatures on Earth, will act in increasingly destructive ways: the tropics becoming uninhabitable for humans for much of the year, along with massive droughts, floods, storms, and fires becoming the norm around the globe. In addition, as we approach 2 degrees, feedback loops will be set in motion, locking in even more warming no matter what we do as humans. (We'll talk more about feedback loops later on.) To be clear, these catastrophes are already happening and will continue even below 2 degrees of heating—but above the limit, the world will likely become unrecognizable.

At the COP21 Paris climate summit in 2015, ambassadors from countries around the world officially agreed to try to limit the rise in temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit). They settled on 1.5 degrees rather than 2 because, when talking about these harmful effects, climate scientists have stressed that targets must be set "well below 2 degrees" to avoid the bleak picture they lay out, and policymakers considered 1.5 degrees safely "well below" that limit. Even if we are able to meet this target, though, we will still face a more erratic and destructive world for many years to come.

How can capitalists go on like this? "Current investments," the study on coal observes, can be seen "as an indication that investors do not believe in future climate policy or that they are confident in their own lobbying power." They still feel that they own the world. Huge investments of any kind are usually sensitive to financial risks, whether it be national or global. Given the enormous amounts of money we're talking about here, it would be unwise for anyone to make those investments if they felt uncertain about the economy. But these fossil capitalists do not see any wrecking balls coming their way. They think they have nothing to fear.

Chapter 1: Discussion Questions

1. What does Malm mean when he says "business-as-usual?" Why has business-as-usual continued unchanged?
2. Why does the author say that capitalist investors in fossil fuels have nothing to fear?
3. What explanation does the author give for why the fossil fuel industry is still profitable and booming?

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING FROM PAST STRUGGLES

How should we respond to the dangerous reality described in Chapter 1? What strategy can we develop that will address the real causes of climate chaos and end fossil fuel extraction and consumption? What kinds of tactics can we use to put such a strategy in place? We've already looked at some strategies and tactics: the global protests of high schoolers organized by Fridays for Future have been very effective tactics that have brought young people—maybe even you!—into the climate movement, and built awareness and a sense of urgency for leaders to *do something now*. But is that enough? Do we need to prevent fossil fuel extraction from continuing, and force the mines to close?

Moral Pacifism and Strategic Pacifism

Many in the climate movement and most of its intellectuals would shudder at the thought of anything beyond absolute nonviolence, because a

particular doctrine has taken hold: that of pacifism. It comes in two main forms. Moral pacifism asserts that it is always wrong to commit acts of violence. This has strange consequences. Consider this case: In August 2019, a young man appeared in a courtroom in the Norwegian capital of Oslo. He had thick purple bruises resembling ski goggles around his eyes, scratch marks all over his face, the wounds stretching down his neck: unmistakable signs of rough manhandling. The previous day, he had entered a mosque with two shotguns and a pistol and started shooting into the prayer room. Inspired by recent massacres at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand (where fifty-one people had been killed), and a shopping mall in El Paso, Texas (where twenty-two people were killed), he intended to kill the maximum number of worshippers because he believed they were a supposed threat to the white race. But barely had he fired his first bullets before a sixty-five-year-old man, Mohammad Rafiq, threw himself on the assailant. Rafiq knocked him to the ground, wrestled with him, warded off the young man's attempt to gouge out his eyes, kicked away his weapons, and held him in a chokehold until the police arrived.

No massacre occurred. But evidently, Rafiq employed a considerable amount of interpersonal violence in the encounter, which would imply that he could no longer call himself a strict pacifist: in the view of a moral pacifist, Rafiq ought not to have resorted to such violent means. Moral pacifism claims to hold life in the highest regard and to stand firmly against the violent termination of a life. But a defensive act that saves lives and reduces violence is unacceptable to the moral pacifist because it involves physical force. This seems flawed. It also appears to feed into the worst forms of evil, because it is precisely those agents most intent on taking as many innocent lives as possible—fascist mass murderers, for instance—who will be the least receptive to meek nonviolent opposition.

Indeed, the teachings of pacifism have often been taken as a philosophy encouraging one to surrender to suffering and atrocity.

A moral pacifist can respond to this sort of objection by saying, "Sure, some violence must be accepted in some cases"—at which point the pacifist ceases to be a pacifist and becomes like everyone else. Setting aside the previously mentioned fascists, very few people believe that violence and war are inherently good; almost all consider those to be bad things that can only be justified in certain cases, and then they proceed to disagree over what those cases are.

But another response is available to the moral pacifist: you can let evil befall yourself without trying to strike it down, and that has its own value because you are demonstrating a higher standard of behavior to the perpetrator. But when asked the obvious, “What if you had to defend your own child?” or “What about World War II?” the moral pacifist has a way of retreating into a mystical, spiritual place. Either openly or vaguely, they hold up the idea of giving themselves up, even to the point of crucifixion—or to some other religious sacrifice, depending on their interpretation of their particular faith. In this view, Mohammad Rafiq would have acted more virtuously had he remained seated on the floor when the murderer stormed in.

We see traces of moral pacifism in the teachings of Bill McKibben. The first cycle of the climate movement had no leader or figurehead, but the second cycle had Bill McKibben, a tireless organizer, an electrifying speaker, a prolific writer with more than a dozen book-length essays, a novel, an autobiography, and countless stirring op-eds under his belt. He’s a natural intellectual and leader of grassroots campaigns, and a driving force behind the actions against the Keystone XL pipeline, the movement for divestment from fossil fuels, and 350.org, a global network spanning the second and third cycles. At the end of the second cycle of the climate movement he was dubbed “the leading climate activist in the world.”

In McKibben’s version of nonviolence, “There is a spiritual insight at its core.” That insight is “the idea of turning the other cheek, of taking on unearned suffering,” the latter a favorite concept of his, borrowed from Martin Luther King Jr. According to MLK’s teaching, “unearned suffering is redemptive.” For someone who is not a follower of this theology, the idea can be hard to grasp. Why would it be noble to take on suffering you don’t deserve? If you claim to oppose evil, it appears in this scenario that you are retreating to that mystical place where you bathe in the suffering as though it were a sort of baptism.

More to the point, how can this be a platform for combating the injustices of the climate catastrophe bearing down on us? If McKibben wants to take on some real unearned suffering, he could apply for citizenship in Dominica, set up a plantain and banana farm, and wait for the next hurricane. Finally, in these very murky philosophical waters, if he wishes for others, not just himself, to experience the wonders of unearned

suffering, then it would follow that we just let global heating and all the other climate catastrophes run their course unchecked.

McKibben, to his credit, obviously doesn't hold to this extreme view, which speaks to his integrity as an activist. But, generally speaking, making unearned suffering a virtue of some kind is a very shaky plank to have in one's platform. Isn't the unearned suffering inflicted on victims exactly what is so morally disgusting about the unfolding climate crisis? If so, why make it a virtue?

Moving away from the puzzle of moral pacifism, we turn to the other school of thought: strategic pacifism. It asserts that violence committed by social movements tends to take them further from their goal. Turning to violent methods is not so much wrong as it is ineffective, counterproductive—poor strategy, in other words. Nonviolence is seen less as a virtue and more of a superior method. Although it springs from moral pacifism and is accented by its moral authority, strategic pacifism has gripped the imagination of the climate movement. McKibben now prefers to speak of non-violence in instrumental terms, as a "technology" or "technique," the greatest "innovation" of the twentieth century; turning the other cheek is above all "the tactically sound choice."

It is Extinction Rebellion (XR), one of the climate organizations that brought citywide disruptions during the third wave of the movement, that adopted strategic pacifism most stridently. According to its own origin story, XR began with a small group of people in the UK going to the library. Freaked out about complete breakdown, they wanted to find a workable strategy for changing the behavior of the powers that be, and what they found was "the civil resistance model." In XR's official handbook, Roger Hallam, cofounder and ideologue, spelled out the creed:

> There are two types of disruption: violent and non-violent. Violence is a traditional method. It is brilliant at getting attention and creating chaos and disruption, but it is often disastrous when it comes to creating progressive change. Violence destroys democracy and the relationships with opponents which are vital to creating peaceful outcomes to social conflict. The social science is totally clear on this: violence does not optimize the chance of successful, progressive outcomes. In fact, it almost always leads to fascism and authoritarianism. The alternative, then, is non-violence.

Much as there is scientific consensus that global heating is the outcome of human deeds, it is equally true that the sum total of social science and history supplies a clear lesson, according to this pamphlet: "If you practice

non-violence, you are more likely to succeed." It follows that popular mobilization against the coming climate change extinctions "has to stay nonviolent. As soon as you allow violence into the mix, you destroy the diversity and community basis upon which all successful mass mobilizations are based." Full compliance with this command is "rule number one for all participants." Rebels (as XR members are known) are instructed to offer flowers to the police. McKibben, for his part, frets about cracks in the discipline that might allow "adventurers" to spoil the movement: only the purity and monopoly of nonviolence gives it a fighting chance to win.

This kind of strategic pacifism comes from not a reading of religious faith, but a reading of history. It has set the climate movement in the global North bubbling and fizzing with references to struggles in the past. Among scholars and activists, there has been a surge of interest in relating the climate movement to past struggles—especially stories of people winning against hopeless odds, with great evil being suddenly eliminated. If they could prevail, the reasoning goes, so can we. If they changed the world by using all means except violence, then we shall save it in the same manner.

The cause-and-effect analogy has become a prime mode of argument in the climate movement, and the main source of strategic thinking, most visibly in XR. Note that the argument is not that violence would be bad at this particular moment, nor that violence might work only under the conditions of severe repression. No.

Instead, this interpretation of strategic pacifism holds that violence is bad in all settings, because this is what history shows. Success belongs to the peaceful.

The historical comparison stories begin with slavery. If the abolitionists could turn the tables on that evil institution by using boycotts, mass meetings, and thundering verbal attacks on the wickedness of slavery, then we will do the same. Just like us, the early abolitionists were first denounced as crackpots and unreasonably impatient radicals, until goodness gained the upper hand. The abolition of slavery is thought of as a reprogramming of ethical codes, and the abolitionists themselves are thought to have been armed primarily with moral force. And so the story goes like this: slavery went from being a foundational national institution to being an abomination; the use of fossil fuels will go the same way. It just stands to moral reason. Things will get better.

Then there were the suffragettes, fighting for women's right to vote. Women gained the right to vote through nonviolent civil disobedience. XR has referred to them as role models. Having shut down central London in April 2019, the XR Rebels earned themselves the title "the new suffragettes." One of the most strident of the members arrested in the action, George Monbiot, recalled the suffragettes as an instructive example from history, and how that applied "to the greatest predicament humanity has ever faced," the climate crisis.

Noblest and most cunning of all, however, was Gandhi. McKibben has revisited the history of the twentieth century and concluded that Gandhi is the one figure of that age who can still speak to us: "I'm not sure I can think of a politics other than Gandhi's that offers much promise." He not only drove the British from India but single-handedly launched the attack "on the legitimacy of colonialism the world around," and if he could achieve all of this with his nonviolent approach, then we have a template for our times. Gandhi was the Einstein of nonviolence, "our scientist of the human spirit, our engineer of political courage." McKibben has described how he returned from a trip to India early in the early 2000s with "Gandhi on the brain" and rolled up his sleeves to tackle the climate crisis.

And let's not forget the US civil rights movement—perhaps the most convincing historical comparison. How well we all know the images and stories of bus boycotts and lunch counter sit-ins, the police violence turned against peaceful students, the marches and speeches that built the movement that ended racial segregation in the American South. We can still see it vividly played out in our imaginations, the tradition of nonviolence successfully used again, the package of tactics familiar and respected.

We also have more recent examples from history, beginning with the story of South Africa's racist system of apartheid—strict racial segregation—which came to an end with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990. This historical comparison is particularly relevant to the current struggle for divestment from fossil fuel industries and businesses that build them. Bill McKibben said, "Just as apartheid was the moral issue" of the late twentieth century, "climate change is the moral issue of our time," alluding to the suffering that global warming is causing in the non-white parts of the world. He also said that "the same kind of tactic [divestment] is what's necessary to face it." As apartheid was defeated, so will the fossil fuel industry, goes the reasoning. Things will simply get better.

And then, just around the time Mandela was released from prison, there was the UK revolt against Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's proposed poll tax, implemented to fund local government by taxing anyone who chose to vote in elections. The XR handbook devotes a chapter to it: ordinary people writing letters, refusing to pay the tax, volunteering to go to jail, using the tactics of nonviolence to resist an unjust tax and achieve the desired outcome. We also have other recent historical examples of nonviolence toppling brutal dictators in Serbia and Egypt. All of these examples shine a light on strict nonviolence as the royal road to climate stabilization, the sole tactic authorized for the entire movement.

How should we assess and evaluate this story of non-violence? Can we determine whether it is the one true strategy for the climate movement? Is it true that the use of nonviolence is the only tactic that works, and that the strategic use of violence is guaranteed to fail?

A full answer is beyond the scope of this book, but perhaps a quick glance back at some of the historical events so often cited in defense of nonviolent protest will help.

The Struggle against Slavery in the United States

Slavery, for example, was not abolished by conscientious white people gently disassembling the institution. The drive to end slavery began and was driven by the enslaved Africans themselves. And they very rarely had the option of nonviolent civil disobedience; staging a sit-in on the cotton plantation or boycotting the food offered by the master could only hasten their death. From Nanny of the Maroons, who guided her fellow slaves in guerrilla warfare against the British in Jamaica, to Nat Turner, who led a four-day slave rebellion that shocked the system in the US, collective action against slavery unavoidably took on the character of violent resistance.

Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Haitian Revolution, a successful rebellion of enslaved people who fought for—and won—their freedom, as well as their independence from France.

The first sweeping emancipation of slaves occurred during the Haitian Revolution that began in 1791, when the enslaved people of the island of Saint-Domingue violently overthrew their slave masters and freed themselves—hardly a bloodless affair. As many recall, slavery in the US was ended with a massive civil war, whose death toll is close to the total from all other US wars combined. And if there was one white abolitionist who helped kickstart the Civil War, it was John Brown, with his armed raids on Southern plantations and weapons depots. “Talk! Talk! Talk!” he exclaimed after yet another convention of a pacifist abolitionist society. “That will never free the slaves! What is needed is action—action.”

John Brown

John Brown was a white abolitionist who worked to end slavery in the US. He was born in 1800 and was active in the years leading up to the Civil War (1861–65). This was a time when slave labor (like fossil fuels today) served as the engine of the US economy. At the time, politicians were caught up in a debate over whether to end slavery altogether or work with Southern plantation owners to simply reshape it. They got bogged down over the economic impacts of ending slavery outright, and many saw it as impossible. But John Brown was not willing to wait for debate.

Although he was often in financial difficulties himself, he was fully dedicated to the abolition of slavery. From his farm in upstate New York, he worked to expand the Underground Railroad into Canada, and he helped about 2,500 former slaves escape the South. He moved to Kansas to fight on the abolitionists' side in their state's civil war; he worked to raise funds to purchase guns for freed slaves and bolster the Underground Railroad; he journeyed between safehouses with liberated slaves; and he helped run a farming community that gave land to free Black men. Through it all, he maintained a dream of gathering enough people to rise up in armed rebellion and end slavery once and for all.

After years of work, he planned a large-scale revolt whose initial target was an arms storage depot in Harpers Ferry, Virginia. His goal was to overpower plantation owners in quick succession and emancipate slaves across the South. Finally, one night in October 1859, he and twenty-two others took over the Harpers Ferry depot, cutting telegraph wires and killing slave owners. But the federal government quickly caught wind of what was happening, and sent in US Marines to suppress them. White militias also descended on and killed many of the rebels. In the aftermath, John Brown was found guilty of treason, and hanged in December 1859. After he died, he became known as a martyr among many abolitionists, but remained a controversial figure.

To this day, Brown's actions are a touchstone in the debate around nonviolence. His tactics were outright violent: he wanted to arm free slaves who could liberate plantations by force, and he himself killed pro-slavery fighters in Kansas. But for all his divisiveness, he helped push the country into action on slavery. When the Civil War began, a year and a half after Brown was hanged, Northern soldiers went into battle singing his name. And whatever we think of his tactics, his commitment to what he knew was a just cause is an example to measure ourselves against.

Would slavery have ended without the slaves and their allies fighting back? One scholar in particular, Portuguese historian João Pedro Marques,

has tried to downplay the important effects of slave revolts. But he has come under a barrage of criticism from other specialists in the field, most notably, the historian Robin Blackburn.

In Blackburn's view, the very notion that slavery was unethical came about through the acts of explosive, violent refusal on the part of slaves. Slavery is unethical because it is harmful to the slaves—whom the masters had wished to portray as happy and passive and compliant. Even the most pacifist Quakers pointed to the revolts as proof of the horrors of the "peculiar institution," as slavery was called by some white people. During the "age of abolition," we saw a growing awareness of the horrors of slavery linked to the violence on the plantations, as they showcased just how much the slaves were willing to risk in their fight for freedom.

Granted, and quite rightly so, the nonviolent efforts of petitioners, demonstrators, and legislators contributed mightily to the ending of slavery. But to credit the success of abolition entirely to their nonviolent efforts, or even to make their efforts the main story, is about as accurate as the belief that yoga is the sole path to human happiness.

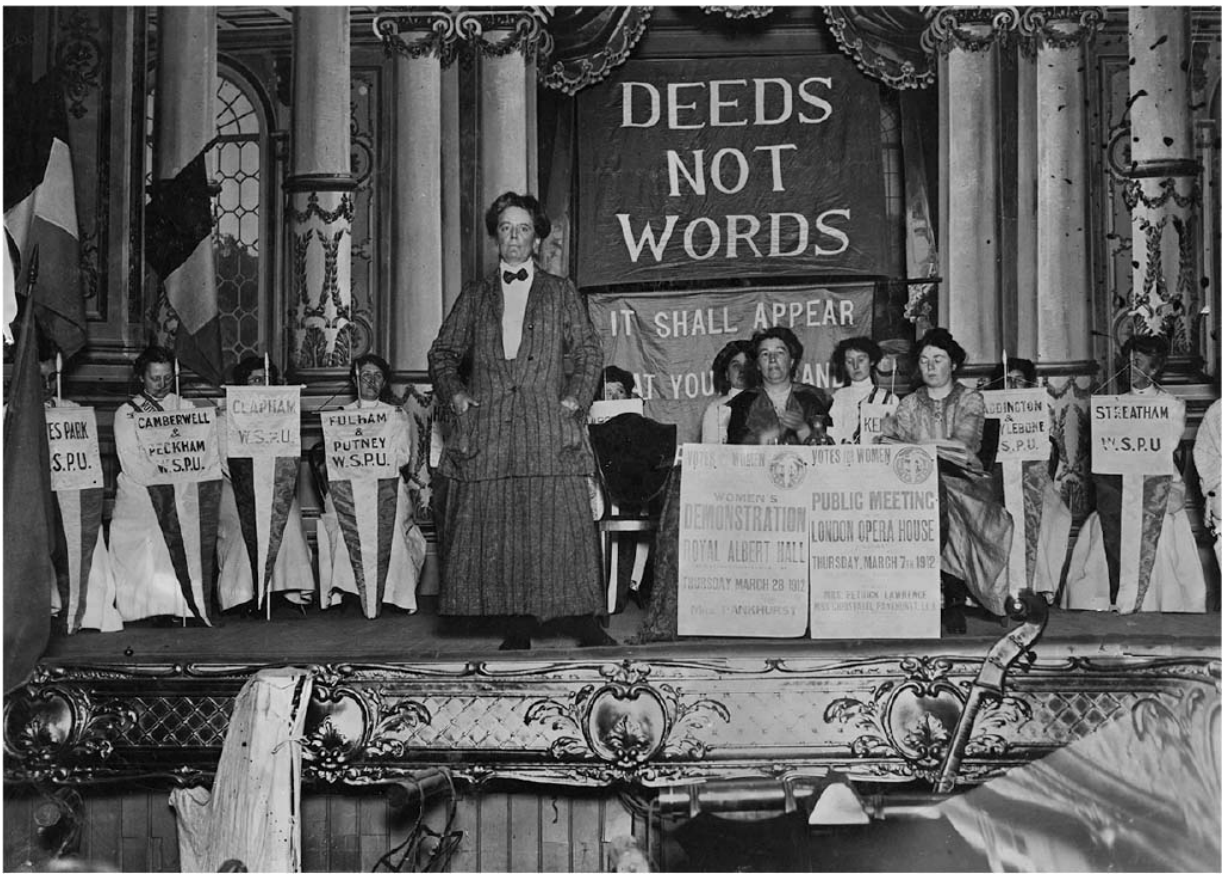
The British Suffragettes

Let's turn to the suffragettes in the United Kingdom, whose story is instructive. Their tactic of choice was property destruction. Decades of patient pressure on Parliament to give women the vote had yielded nothing, and so in 1903, under the slogan "Deeds, not words," the Women's Social and Political Union was founded. Five years later, two WSPU members undertook the first militant action: breaking windowpanes in the prime minister's residence. One of them told the police she would bring a bomb the next time. Fed up with their own fruitless pleadings to Parliament, the suffragettes soon specialized in "the argument of the broken pane," sending hundreds of well-dressed women down streets to smash every window they passed. In the most concentrated volley, in March 1912, Emmeline Pankhurst and her crews brought much of central London to a standstill by shattering the fronts of jewelers, silversmiths, Hamleys toy shop, and dozens of other businesses. They also torched mailboxes around the capital. Shocked Londoners would stumble upon the objects throwing up flames,

the work of some activist having thrown in a package of paper soaked in kerosene along with a lit match.

If we look at the history, the British suffragettes hardly followed a model of nonviolent civil resistance. This looks more like the methods envisioned in Lanchester's Paradox: if things are dire, the logical response should not be peaceful and passive.

Militancy was at the core of suffragette identity: "To be militant in some form, or other, is a moral obligation," Pankhurst lectured. "It is a duty which every woman will owe her own conscience and self-respect, to women who are less fortunate than she is herself, and to all who are to come after her." The latest complete portrait of the movement, Diane Atkinson's book *Rise Up, Women!* provides an encyclopedic list of militant actions: suffragettes forcing the prime minister out of his car and dousing him with pepper, hurling a stone at the transom window above Winston Churchill's door, setting upon statues and paintings with hammers and axes, planting bombs on sites along the routes of royal processions, fighting policemen with staffs, charging against hostile politicians with dogwhips, breaking windows in prison cells. Such deeds went hand in hand with mass mobilization. The suffragettes organized mammoth rallies, ran their own presses, went on hunger strikes: they deployed the entire range of nonviolent and militant actions.



A meeting of the Women's Social and Political Union in 1912, the leading British suffragette organization. The banner reads, "Deeds Not Words," indicating the suffragettes' militant belief that direct action and property destruction were necessary to force the British government to grant women voting rights.

After the hopes of attaining the vote by constitutional methods was dashed once more in early 1913, the movement switched gears. In a systematic campaign of arson, the suffragettes set fire to or blew up villas, tea pavilions, boathouses, hotels, haystacks, churches, post offices, aqueducts, theaters, and a wide range of other targets around the country. Over the course of a year and a half, the WSPU claimed responsibility for 337 such attacks. Few culprits were apprehended. Not a single life was lost; the only buildings that were set ablaze were empty.

The suffragettes took great pains to avoid injuring people. But they considered the situation urgent enough to justify arson. Votes for women, Pankhurst explained, were of such pressing importance that "we had to discredit the Government and Parliament in the eyes of the world; we had to spoil English sports, hurt businesses, destroy valuable property, demoralise

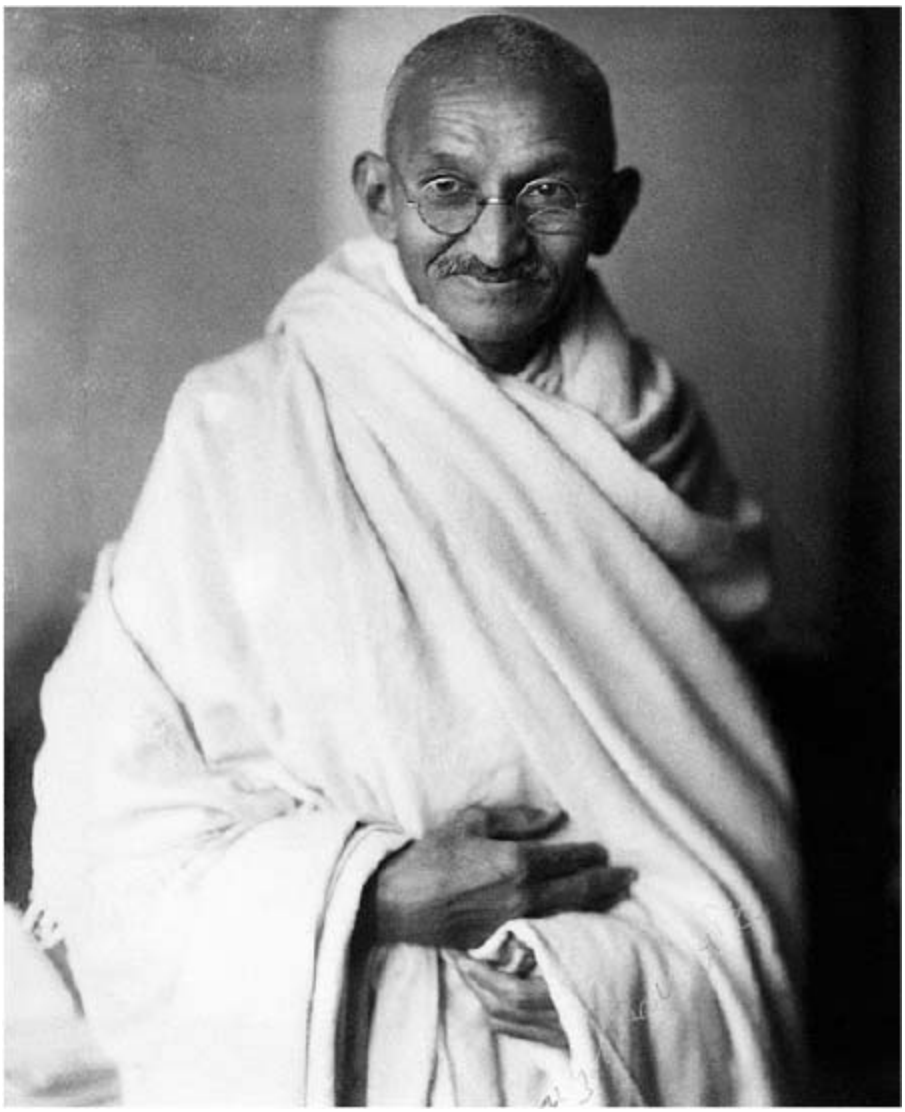
the world of society, shame the churches, upset the whole orderly conduct of life." Some attacks probably went unclaimed. One historian suspects that the suffragettes were behind one of the most spectacular blazes of the period; a fire in a Tyneside coal wharf, in which the facilities for loading coal were completely gutted. They did, however, claim responsibility for the burning of motor cars and a steam yacht.

Emmeline Pankhurst and Her Daughters

Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) was included in *Time* magazine's list of the one hundred most important people of the twentieth century. She and her daughters, Adela, Christabel, and Sylvia, fought tirelessly for women's rights in Britain over many years. They advocated for suffrage and against the horrific conditions in the women's workhouses at the time. Focusing on the right to vote as a necessary step in ending those conditions, and after years of watching society make no real progress toward women's suffrage, Emmeline founded the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which focused on direct action over appealing to politicians. WSPU activists were arrested frequently and went on hunger strikes during their imprisonment to keep attention on their cause—a tactic later emulated by their counterparts in the United States. While in prison, Sylvia was force-fed over ten times, an extremely painful practice used against her and others on hunger strike. The WSPU and their tactics of property destruction died down in the wake of World War I, but the tides were turning for women's suffrage. In 1918, Parliament passed an act giving the right to vote to a certain group of British women—only those over the age of thirty who either owned property or were married to a property-owning man. It wasn't until 1928 that all women over twenty-one were given access to the ballot. In the United States, the suffrage movement won women the right to vote in 1920.

Gandhi and the Anticolonial Movement in India

Now, when considering Mahatma Gandhi, often seen as the visionary leader who led a nonviolent movement that kicked British colonialists out of India, we have to be aware of the entire picture. Anyone who sees him as the supreme example of nonviolent struggle should pick up Kathryn Tidrick's masterful biography *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life*. During Gandhi's time living in South Africa, he found his British masters marching off to the Boer War (1899–1902)—and ran after them, begging them to enlist him and his fellow Indians. A few years later, the British again marched out to the provinces in South Africa, this time to fight the Zulus who rebelled against oppressive taxes and had to be flogged and mass executed into submission, and again Gandhi asked to serve. To his disappointment, he was taken on only as a stretcher-bearer and nurse on both occasions, but in his autobiography he claimed his share of military glory by arguing that medical staff are as indispensable to war as any soldiers on the front lines. So at one point in his life, Gandhi enthusiastically supported war, as well as the British Empire.



Mahatma Gandhi, 1931, was revered as the pacifist leader of the Indian struggle against British colonialism.

“Gandhi famously resisted any use of violence,” and so the climate movement should model itself on the great leader—that is the standard story. But did he? Perhaps the Boer and Zulu episodes were just youthful blunders? Hardly had World War I broken out in 1914 before Gandhi offered himself up to the British Empire yet again. In early 1918, antiwar movements across Europe were busy trying to end the slaughter, agitating for soldiers to desert and turn against their generals, at which point Gandhi decided that more Indians had to be thrown into the trenches. “If I became your recruiting agent-in-chief, I might rain men on you,” he flattered the

viceroy, promising another half-million Indian men on top of the 1 million already in regiments or graveyards, leaving no avenue in the countryside unexplored in his search for eager volunteers. (Few showed up, which he considered a profoundly humiliating setback.) In these recruitment drives, Gandhi pursued a logic of sorts. As long as Indians were seen as effeminate and weak, the British would never consider them equals and grant them independence; to prove their manhood and strength, they had to become brothers-in-arms. Gandhi's strategy for national liberation never—this is true—condoned violence against the British, but it did include violence *with* them. In India, he mightily disapproved of the popular violence against the British occupation in India that seemed to accompany mass actions like clockwork. He would set up campaigns that engaged Indians in non-cooperation and lawbreaking in large groups, a form of resistance called *satyagraha*. But whenever he received word of Indian crowds sabotaging transport systems, cutting telegraph wires, burning shops, breaking into police stations, and attacking constabularies, he was consistently perplexed and livid.

He likewise frowned upon antifascist resistance. In November 1938, in the days after a night of brutality and violence that the Nazis carried out against the Jews, known as Kristallnacht, Gandhi published an open letter to the Jews of Germany urging them to stick to the principles of nonviolence and to relish the results. "Suffering voluntarily undergone will bring them an inner strength and joy," he wrote. In Gandhi's mind, Hitler might implement "a general massacre of the Jews," but "if the Jewish mind could be prepared for voluntary suffering, even the massacre I have imagined could be turned into a day of thanksgiving," because "to the god-fearing, death has no terror. It is a joyful sleep." Gandhi faced objections to this and had to clarify his comments. In a January 1939 letter, Gandhi responded that if only they could take on their suffering with courage, even "the stoniest German heart will melt." Further, "I plead for more suffering and still more till the melting has become visible to the naked eye." In any case, "the method of violence gives no greater guarantee than that of non-violence. It gives infinitely less."

The essence of nonviolence in Gandhi's philosophy was to abstain from sexual intercourse: the soul would reach mystical heights only if it learned to "crucify the flesh." In the middle of a wave of mass mobilization in 1920, he directed all Indians to go celibate until further notice. The best

course of all, he argued, would be if all of humanity ceased to have sex, because then our species would change into something holier. He had other troubling beliefs stemming from this idea that suffering made humans holier and better, including that disease and earthquakes were only visited on societies that were “impure” and in need of cleansing. Here, we see the heart of Gandhi’s theory of pacifism: it is not that nonviolence is a successful tactic but that he believed suffering was spiritually beneficial.

Over his life, Gandhi’s political compass spun wildly, his magnetic north consistently being his view of himself as, from Tidrick’s biography, “the pre-ordained and potentially divine world saviour.” No one doubts Gandhi’s role in helping remove the British from India. But he is obviously not a perfect human—far from it. So the fact that he can emerge as an icon of the climate movement—not to mention “our scientist of the human spirit,” as McKibben says—shows how much we forget what actually happened in the twentieth century as we rush to claim certain men as our heroes and guiding lights.

Needless to say, the mass mobilizations led by the Indian National Congress, the Gandhi-led Salt Marches, and other nonviolent campaigns, as well as the mass refusal to cooperate with the British colonial authorities were all inspiring. But to say that Indian independence resulted from those actions alone is, once again, to look at history with one eye closed. Violence marked the route to Indian independence, from the mutiny of 1857 to that of 1946. By the time the British finally packed up and left, a world war had drained the empire of its strength. These were the years, 1947 through the early 1960s, when decolonization swept the globe. To isolate Gandhi’s nonviolent political resistance as the primary example of and means for decolonization is to seriously misrepresent the process. How did Algeria get free? Angola? Guinea-Bissau? Kenya? Vietnam? Ireland? Wars were fought in all these cases to bring about independence.

The US Civil Rights Movement

The American civil rights movement might be a better case for the pacifist argument. The Montgomery bus boycott, the lunch counter sit-ins, the Birmingham campaign, the Selma to Montgomery marches, and other

nonviolent actions really did upend segregation in the American South. In their use of tactics that sought immediate gains and mass participation, they were far more effective than many critics at the time would allow. For the rest of the country to see the spectacle of peaceful protesters, many of them students, being beaten and jailed for fighting for their own equality, it did help build mass outrage and support for the movement.

However, nonviolence was not enough on its own: a lesser-known aspect of the movement is the armed protection some folks provided to civil rights activists. Charles E. Cobb Jr. tells this history in his book *This Non-violent Stuff'll Get You Killed*. (Cobb was a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee —SNCC, pronounced "snick.") In the Deep South, rural African American communities had developed a long tradition of holding off murderous assaults with weapons.

As the civil rights movement took root and began to prove effective, its proponents also faced the same threats to their lives. Klansmen and other white supremacists would surround civil rights movement bases in the night, assassinate activists, ambush marches, and seek to drown the budding civil rights achievements in blood. But too much was on the line for Black communities to let that happen. So they stockpiled guns, refurbished movement bases—called "freedom houses"—into actual fortifications, provided armed escorts for field secretaries from SNCC and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality, another key civil rights group), and they organized armed caravans to and from mass meetings. Guns in hand, Black people chased away Klansmen in the night, guarded picket lines from a distance, and accompanied marches and voter registrations—not in opposition to but *in unison* with the civil rights movement. Committed pacifists from the North tended to adapt to these realities. Even Martin Luther King Jr. adapted: during a visit with MLK in his home, soon after his home had been bombed, a journalist nearly sunk into an armchair before being alerted to a couple of loaded guns on it. "Just for self-defense," King explained.

SNCC

SNCC (pronounced “snick”), the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, was the leading voice for students and other young people in challenging racial oppression and segregation in the US South and fighting for civil rights in the 1960s. It was led by university students who had grown tired of the slow pace of the civil rights movement, and of the way older adults were dominating the movement’s actions. University students coalesced around a form of protest known as the sit- in, a direct- action tactic to forcibly integrate restaurants and lunch counters. After four Black students staged the first sit- in in 1960 at a Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina, the tactic spread among youth around the South—similar to how the Fridays for Future protests rapidly spread from Sweden across the world.

After organizing on their individual campuses, student activists came together to form a unified group that pushed the civil rights movement to pick up the pace and intensity of organizing. The coalition included both Black and white students, and became known for its system of democratic governance and commitment to peer training in movement skills: SNCC gave many young activists the tools to become leaders, and stuck to a rotating leadership role within the coalition. In the early days, they were guided by Gandhian nonviolence, but factions advocating for direct action and more confrontational tactics soon emerged. Despite their commitment to pacifism, SNCC activists faced intense violence from white supremacists: during the Freedom Rides to protest segregation on buses, dedicated Black and white SNCC activists traveled throughout the South on buses together, keeping the momentum going even as the Freedom Riders faced brutal attacks by the KKK and other white mobs as the police looked on.

In 1964, SNCC helped create “Freedom Summer,” bringing students from around the country to “Freedom Schools” in the South, where they learned about the realities of racism and helped register African Americans to vote—a form of direct action because it challenged many state laws at the time, and an activity that led to the murder of a number of activists—including three of SNCC’s own volunteers. The Freedom Schoolers registered thousands of people and helped turn the tide on the voting laws. SNCC organizers continued to stay in rural Southern towns, organizing people at the local level to push for political change. Their work brought renewed national attention to the issue of Southern segregation and trained a generation of antiracist and social justice activists who went on to oppose the war in Vietnam, fight for women’s rights, and more.

“What is the best way to resist?” This was, in Cobb’s account, the question African Americans asked themselves during the civil rights

struggle. Nonviolent civil disobedience caught on because it worked—better than the alternatives, such as guerrilla warfare against the state—and was appreciated precisely as a *tactic*, rather than as a creed or as a non-negotiable belief. Taking such an approach to nonviolence meant that changing tactics to suit a particular need came naturally. The best method to resist in some circumstances (on a bridge patrolled by police, for example) would not be the best one in others (Klansmen encircling a house). "From the beginning," Cobb affirms, "the line between armed self-defense and the non-violent assertion of civil rights was blurred." And it was even more blurred in the wider picture.

The civil rights movement grew through an active interplay with other currents in the struggle for racial justice. The culmination of the struggle—the burst of new laws enacted in the 1960s to ensure the rights of Black people—did not come about entirely of its own doing. Take the case of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the centerpiece of all the new laws: why did the federal government meet the long-standing demands of Martin Luther King and his peers at this moment? The turning point came during the Birmingham offensive in 1963. When the sit-ins, kneel-ins, and jail-ins against segregation in the city landed King in a prison cell, the first rocks and bottles were hurled. (A message that protesters, if they continued to be ignored, could not be expected to remain nonviolent.)

Then, two white supremacist bombings in Birmingham quickly set off one of the most momentous Black urban rebellions of the era, with crowds assailing police officers and smashing property. For the first time, federal troops were sent in to put down the uprisings. From his prison cell, King could now signal a warning: if the demands of his movement were not met, other, more violent forces would arise. If the path of non violence remained closed, "millions of Negroes, out of frustration and despair, will seek solace and security in Black nationalist ideologies." This scenario played into the government's fears of widespread, uncontrollable rebellion and curdled the blood of President John F. Kennedy's administration. Men who had the president's ear began to bombard him with warnings that unless major concessions were made, public order would break down. Without swift results, they said, "Negroes unquestionably will look to untried and perhaps less responsible leaders"—notably the Black Power organizer Malcolm X, who advocated resistance "by any means necessary." Because of this fear of an escalated and violent movement, the federal government caved. The

nonviolent civil rights movement won the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because it had a radical flank that made the entire movement more powerful, forcing the government to feel an urgency to address the movement's demands.

That radical flank was associated with Black violence, always a source of fear in the white psyche. In the classical study of the radical flank effect, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954–1970,* Herbert H. Haines explains the tension: "Nonviolent direct action struck at the heart of powerful political interests because it could so easily turn to violence. The result was federal action designed to make further protest unnecessary." And Birmingham, of course, was only the beginning: a few years later, the cities of the North were aflame—more than one thousand businesses damaged or destroyed in Newark, New Jersey, alone in 1967; 313 rebellions nationwide in the first eight months of 1968—and again the government tried to stem the tide by throwing fresh laws at the movement, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1968 and its ban on racial discrimination in housing, which passed amid the roar of sirens and shattered windows.

Property destruction was a particularly distressing prospect for American political leaders. If the cities burned, "the White man's companies will have to take the losses," whined one close adviser to presidents Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Over the course of the 1950s and '60s, the goalposts moved regarding what should be considered a moderate stance. The radicals of yesteryear—the civil rights leaders who incited people to break the law—came to look quite reasonable and restrained in comparison to the new threat of Black revolution. This included the Black Power Movement, the Black Panther Party, and other Black guerrilla groups. Because of the actions of these groups, integration seemed a tolerable price to pay for white America.

Without Malcolm X, there might not have been a Martin Luther King.

The theory of the radical flank effect has applications far beyond the African American struggle. The history of working-class politics in twentieth-century western Europe is a good example. The vote, the eight-hour working day, the beginnings of the welfare state—all of this progress made by the labor movement would have been unthinkable without the radical flank on the left, and the threat of a successful communist revolution to the east, in the Soviet Union. In the words of Verity Burgmann, "The history of social movement activity suggests that reforms are more likely to be achieved when activists behave in extremist, even confrontational ways.

Social movements rarely achieve everything they want, but they secure important partial victories” when one wing, flanking the rising tide in the mainstream, prepares to blow the status quo sky high.

Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, waiting for a press conference in Washington, DC, March 26, 1964.

Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.

Malcolm X was born in 1925, Martin Luther King in 1929; both were born with names different from those they would take later, and both were assassinated at about forty years of age. Both clearly saw the injustices in the way white America treated its Black citizens, and felt called to fight against them. Both were teachers, speakers, and organizers who went on to lead powerful organizations that would change the course of history. And both were under surveillance by the government, including the FBI. But for all their similarities, we tend to think of them today as counterpoints to one another: MLK, the pacifist civil rights leader who pushed for equality through civil disobedience, versus Malcolm X, proponent of Black nationalism and separatism, who believed in freedom by any means necessary. Of course, this is a more simplistic version than the actual history.

Martin and Malcolm did have different visions in their struggles for justice, which came both from their personal histories and where they lived in their adult years. Based in Alabama, Martin excelled in school and wrote about the inequality around him from a young age. In 1954, at age twenty- five he became a pastor in Montgomery, Alabama. There, he was propelled to civil rights leadership during the bus boycott that Claudette Colvin and Rosa Parks set in motion in 1955. Over the next several years, he became known as a fierce speaker who preached about nonviolent methods and integrationist goals. He is most well known for his leadership and organizing to end segregationist policies and secure voting rights for Black people in the South. He encouraged Black people to take up the ballot as a way to gain rights and equality in a nation dominated by white supremacy.

Based in Harlem, New York City, Malcolm X was deeply familiar with the frustration and anger Black people in the North felt about the injustices that white society—and particularly white supremacists and police—inflicted on them through economic oppression and brutal violence. He believed Black freedom could only come through separation from white society, rather than relying on white people to grant favors, and that Black people should defend themselves by whatever means necessary—including with weapons. From 1952 until 1964, he was a member of the Nation of Islam, a Black Muslim institution led by Elijah Muhammad, who preached the need for a separate Black state in the face of hundreds of years of racial oppression. Malcolm X rose to fame as a charismatic speaker in the organization, preaching Black nationalism and revolutionary politics. He mobilized thousands to join the movement. He eventually left the Nation of Islam, at odds with its focus on religion over politics and disillusioned by Muhammad's private scandals. The Nation was furious and sent him death threats. In early 1965, he was assassinated.

Malcolm and Martin often had disparaging things to say of the other's philosophy. Martin saw the growing Black Power movement, and the violence it condoned, as divisive and harmful to the cause of freedom. Nevertheless, he was able to leverage that threat in his appeals to the government, as we have seen. Malcolm, on the other hand, believed the civil rights movement's hope for integration was a fantasy. He disparaged MLK as a puppet of the US government who accepted weak legislation and avoided becoming truly disruptive.

As the years went on, though, each of their philosophies evolved and became more complementary. After a pilgrimage to Mecca, Malcolm's views became more multi-cultural—he began preaching for people to rise up regardless of race, focusing his rage on the state and those who tolerate and support it. In 1964, he was working to push world leaders at the United Nations to make a declaration about the United States' unjust treatment of its Black citizens. At home, he was pushing for more collaboration between civil rights groups—while still maintaining his militancy. And while he may have been frustrated by Martin's willingness to work with the US government, there is no doubt Martin, too, was a radical. While Martin remained nonviolent, his politics over the years became more threatening to the government. By 1967, he had broadened his focus to take up Black workers' rights and oppose the Vietnam war.

When he was assassinated in 1968, he was in the process of organizing a national poor people's movement, which aimed to unite poor whites and Blacks and fight for economic justice.

For those of us in the climate movement, we can take lessons from both Martin and Malcolm, remembering that different tactics will have useful applications in different places and times.

This argument provides food for thought to the climate movement. The fact that (as of this writing) it has not given rise to a single riot or wave of property destruction would for the strategic pacifists be taken as a sign of strength, proof that their model is being followed. But could it not also be seen as the opposite—as a failure to bring about a social depth to the movement, a way to highlight the emergency of the crisis we face, and bring about a radical flank that can be used for tactical advantage?

Greta Thunberg might well be the climate equivalent of Rosa Parks, an inspiration she has acknowledged and often been compared to, but she is not (yet) a revolutionary figure like Angela Davis or Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael.

South Africa's Struggle against Apartheid

Selective memory about the effectiveness of non-violence applies to South Africa's history, too. It took more than divestment and boycotts to bring about the downfall of apartheid. It also took more than civil disobedience: in the 1950s and early '60s, the African National Congress (ANC), the leading anti-apartheid protest organization in the country, experimented with bus boycotts, strikes, pass-burnings (all non-whites were required to carry a pass to move through the different parts of the country), and campaigns to refuse racial segregation in trains and post offices. They found that all those nonviolent tactics only resulted in more oppression. If anything, it only made the oppression even more overwhelming.

After the infamous Sharpeville massacre in 1960, when police shot into a crowd of Black African protesters, killing 69 and wounding 186, the ANC leaders realized that they had to ratchet up the pressure, and thus formed uMkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), abbreviated as MK. It was Nelson Mandela himself who pushed for the reorientation: "Our policy to achieve a non-racial state by non-violence has achieved nothing," so "we

will have to reconsider our tactics. In my mind we are closing a chapter on this question of a non-violent policy." Having won over his colleagues to the new strategy, Mandela was appointed first commander of the MK. As he later recalled:

> Our strategy was to make selective forays against military installations, power plants, telephone lines and transportation links; targets that would not only hamper the military effectiveness of the state, but frighten National Party supporters, scare away foreign capital, and weaken the economy. This we hoped would bring the government to the bargaining table. Strict instructions were given to members of the MK that we would countenance no loss of life. But if sabotage did not produce the results we wanted, we were prepared to move on to the next stage: guerrilla warfare and terrorism.

Sabotage remained the main tactic of the MK. Much like the British suffragettes, the commando units crossing the borders into apartheid land struck against property—things like transmission towers and power stations. The actions had a rousing effect on the Black South African masses, most of whom lived in the country's townships. Seeing in these more radical actions the evidence that resistance was possible, they streamed into the ANC. Songs, slogans, dances, and other symbolic acts celebrating the MK were part of the mobilization against apartheid into the 1980s, when the ANC captured its strategic doctrine in the slogan of "the hammer of armed struggle on the anvil of mass action." Strategic pacifism does not have much to draw on here.

When considering the days of Margaret Thatcher's poll tax in Britain, we must ask ourselves if a little censoring angel is sitting on the shoulder of today's strategic pacifist, whispering, "Don't mention that!" Because as everyone who's ever heard of the poll tax knows, the revolt against it finished with mass riots in London that killed the tax off. That Extinction Rebellion can devote an entire chapter to the poll tax struggle in Britain without mentioning the property-destroying riots is a clear indication of the psychology of strategic pacifism: much of what actually happened is repressed in people's recollection. None of the radical actions mentioned above is news, or even information that is hard to come by. The bloodletting in the slave revolts and the US Civil War, the militancy of the suffragettes, Gandhi's devotion to the British imperial army, the armed protection and radical flank of the civil rights movement, the Spear of the Nation—this is all in the public domain and easy to find, and respected historians have been telling these stories for years.

Yet, proponents of strategic pacifism identify these more radical actions of struggle to warn the climate movement against any deviation from nonviolence. This is a mixture of hypocrisy, piety, and selective memory loss. It turns its back on its promise to treat non violent civil disobedience as a tactic—something you do because it works well—which implies an openness to reevaluating the tactic as your struggle unfolds. If nonviolence is not to be treated as some sort of holy covenant or sacred rite, then we must accept the position of Mandela: “I called for non-violent protest for as long as it was effective,” as “a tactic that should be abandoned when it no longer worked.” But we see how strategic pacifism turns nonviolence into a fetish, a holy icon—outside of history, unrelated to time, something to be unconditionally respected regardless of circumstance.

Comparing the Climate Crisis to Past Revolutions

The leaders of the climate movement are making a strange case: admittedly, violence did occur in the struggle against slavery, against male monopoly of the vote, against British and other colonial occupations, against apartheid, against the poll tax, but the struggle against fossil fuels is a completely different struggle and will succeed only on the condition of pacifism in the purest sense. But does this position convince us? Is the root problem of fossil fuel somehow different from these other struggles? Is it such an easy problem to fix that smaller efforts will do? But how could that be the case? Aren’t fossil fuels absolutely intertwined with power and profits? Should we expect less friction, less conflict in this transition, in which emissions must go from astronomical highs back to zero? Do our experiences so far tell us that we can accomplish this without ever having to consider other methods of resistance? If so, what exactly sets the climate apart from those other crises?

If the comparisons are to be taken seriously—and this emergency should indeed rank alongside the great injustice and violence of slavery or apartheid—then the conclusion would seem to be that the climate crisis is as serious as the others. In some respects, this emergency is even worse.

It could be argued that humanity has never faced a situation like this before, and so comparisons with the past are useless. There is some truth in this. The structure of the climate problem is different from the other problems. Fossil fuel combustion is not a system for keeping a racially defined population in captivity and whipping the maximum amount of labor out of those bodies, as slavery was. One factor that made the Kennedy administration cave to the civil rights movement was the embarrassing fact of cops brutalizing demonstrators in front of rolling cameras. This contradicted "American moral superiority" during that period, a situation that doesn't resemble our current reality in the 2020s. In fact, every problem described above had concrete social factors not in place today. Most crucially, fossil fuels are not a type of political arrangement such as limited access to the vote or racial exclusion laws: instead, they and the technologies they power are productive forces, the industries that produce the energy our entire economic system (and society) has come to rely on. Fossil fuels shape everything around us.

The comparison with slavery does have some merit, however—enslaved peoples were also productive forces whose forced labor produced great wealth for the people that claimed to own them. Their bodies were used in a tremendously destructive fashion, and when slavery was abolished it meant that a whole system of producing wealth and capital—slave labor—had to be stopped immediately. This is similar to fossil fuel in some ways, since the destructive use of fossil fuel produces great profits for a few while harming many others. To suddenly abandon fossil fuels and leave them in the ground and under the ocean would mean a huge source of profit and wealth would, overnight, disappear. Moreover, as climate scientist and activist James Hansen has argued, fossil fuels, like slavery, cannot be something to compromise on; no one would consider reducing slavery by 40 percent or 60 percent. All of it must go.

Given that fossil fuels are indeed this kind of problem, comparing it with toppling dictators makes for a poor comparison. Yet, as a point of comparison Roger Hallam of XR holds up for us a mighty image of thousands of demonstrators flowing into a square to demand the departure of a dictator. "The arrogance of the authorities leads them to overreact, and the people—approximately 1%–3% of the population is ideal—will rise up and bring down the regime," he writes. "It's very quick: around one or two weeks on average. Bang: suddenly it's over. Unbelievable, but it happens

that way." Well, clearly it won't happen that way: fossil fuels will not be abolished in a week or two (nor was slavery). It won't conclude in some miraculous manner, because fossil fuels are not a rickety political structure that can be swept away through a swift attack by the people. Therefore, comparing the climate movement to toppling a dictator is a false comparison.

Business-as-usual, which runs on fossil fuels, is not a sideshow in today's democratic systems, nor is it an antique system from a past authoritarian age that requires correction (as with a dictator from an entrenched political regime). No, fossil fuel business-as-usual is simply the tangible, material form of today's capitalism, neither more nor less. It is the lifeblood of our current way of life.

And yet the "civil resistance model" that many of today's climate activists rely on is based on movements for ousting dictators. Extinction Rebellion founders consulted *Why Civil Resistance Works*, a book by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, when they established their own doctrine of strategic pacifism. Chenoweth and Stephan place dictatorship and foreign occupation in one corner, and democracy and independence in the other. Then, they classify different campaigns to oust dictatorships and foreign occupations as being violent or nonviolent. They compiled more than three hundred examples in a database, the bulk of which were concerned with democracy, and concluded that non violence is twice as likely to succeed. Palestinians became violent, Slovenians stayed nonviolent; the former failed, the latter succeeded.

The lesson for XR activists seems crystal clear, and is the source of XR tactics.

Behind the glossy arithmetic, however, Chenoweth and Stephan exhibit the usual omissions and suppressions. Peter Gelderloos, a scholar who has heavily critiqued their work, points out that their criteria for "violent" campaigns are any that cause over one thousand deaths, while their criteria for nonviolence is much less concrete, allowing them to cherry-pick successful movements. For example, this framework leads them to argue that nonviolent resistance against Hitler was more successful than violent resistance, discounting an entire world war from the equation. At any rate, this comparison of apples and oranges from history is designed to drive home the message that as soon as activists go violent, they cut their own throats.

This can give strategic pacifist activists the illusion of beingall-knowing:*this* cause has *that* effect, therefore we choose nonviolence always. Suffice it to say that the comparisons drawn from Chenoweth and Stephan, and which inform the XR model, do not hold up under intellectual scrutiny.

Iran's Experience: 1979

A different argument altogether could be made—that although the climate crisis is different from all crises that came before it, we do see a few examples of resistance where gains were made, such as the struggles against dictatorships. Although they are different in scope, long-lived dictatorships can be somewhat like the climate crisis in that they are very rigidly structured and well protected, just as the fossil fuel economy is. So we might look at one case that is very important to Chenoweth and Stephan: Iran. The authors seek to prove that violence and mass mobilization are incompatible, in all cases. They hold that this incompatibility applies to the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, a repressive monarch with friendly ties to colonial powers. The revolution that toppled the Shah in 1979 was one of the most popular in history: it engaged about 10 percent of the population, compared with the much smaller segment of people—just 1 percent—that overthrew the Soviet Union in 1989.

The run-up to the overthrow of the Shah shares some elements in common with the current climate mobilizations: both had or have recurring demonstrations at fixed intervals in the calendar, drawing ever-larger crowds; widening and intensifying strikes (including among oil workers); and occupations of key sites (such as factories and palaces). What tipped the balance in Iran? The story constructed by Chenoweth and Stephan holds that radical Iranians first sought to defeat the Shah by means of armed struggle in the 1970s, mainly through the Marxist guerrilla group known as the Fedaiyan. This effort failed dismally. But, as the story is told by Chenoweth and Stephan, when Iranian people switched to nonviolence, they reached their goal in no time.

The problem is that this is, once again, a more simplistic account than what actually happened. The most detailed chronicle of the process comes

from scholar Misagh Parsa's *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*. He reveals a building wave of popular resistance eventually rising so high as to submerge the Shah's regime. The mobilized civilians sustained attacks from the army, from government thugs, from the civil police and the SAVAK (the secret police) for months, until they "aggressively struck back at the armed forces" in the autumn of 1978. In the city of Amol, they equipped themselves with bows and poisoned arrows, and overwhelmed the garrison and seized their weapons. In Dezful, they dropped bags of sand on patrolling soldiers, then jumped on and disarmed them. In Hamadan, they burned down government buildings until the city "came to resemble an ancient ruin." In the capital city of Tehran, hundreds of such buildings and banks were on fire by early November. In Ahvaz, managers of US oil companies were shot or had their cars set alight. From the west to the east, furious crowds laid siege to SAVAK offices, tore down statues of the Shah, stormed the homes of regime officials, took over cities, used weapons they'd taken from government forces to defend them against thugs, and formed revolutionary militias.

The Fedaiyan rushed forward and attacked police stations, military trucks, barracks, and armories. But, as scholar Michael Axworthy tells us, "most of the violence of the crowds was directed at property, not people." The militant actions surged higher and higher in tandem with mass demonstrations and a general strike—a form of resistance where everyone stops working in protest, and business comes to a standstill. Several million people were on the march by December, paralyzing the streets. By February 1979, a situation of dual power had emerged, with remnants of the Shah's regime clinging on to power via the military while the revolutionaries built popular power in the streets. At that point, commandos from the Fedaiyan joined mutinous air force cadets and "broke the deadlock through an armed insurrection," in the words of Asef Bayat, preeminent scholar of the Iranian Revolution. Finally, the forces of the Shah were routed, and the people celebrated in a moment of mass euphoria.

The Egyptian Revolution and the Arab Spring

It is instructive to turn our attention now to Egypt and the 2011 Arab Spring movement in Cairo's Tahrir Square, when a mass movement toppled the repressive dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak, who had been in power since 1981. The eighteen days of intense activity have entered the strategic-pacifist story as another positive case study of peace power. But the millions of Egyptians did not reach Tahrir Square by offering flowers to the police. On the decisive Friday of Anger, January 28, 2011, they picked up tear gas canisters, pieces of sidewalk, and other projectiles and fought their way through the dense cordons and roadblocks across the bridges to Tahrir Square, a symbolic meeting place in the heart of Cairo. It was "a confrontation that turned peaceful protesters into violent protesters who defeated the riot police out of necessity and despair," to quote M. Cherif Bassiouni's hefty *Chronicle of the Egyptian Revolution and Its Aftermath*.

In the total number of days it took to expel Mubarak—eighteen—the first three nights possibly count as nonviolent. During the remainder of the uprising, at least one-quarter of the country's police stations—over 50 percent in Cairo, over 60 percent in Alexandria—were sacked. The national tally of demolished police vehicles reached four thousand. The effect of this explosion of mass violence against the police (which, needless to say, was responsible for the vast majority of casualties) was not to scare away ordinary people, but exactly the opposite: it invited them to Tahrir Square. The destroyed police stations meant the government was less able to repress its citizens, and could only look on as demonstrators took to the streets. Rather than violence and mass movements being "incompatible," as Chenoweth and Stephan argue, here they were "synergistic and complementary," in the words of Neil Ketchley, another student of the Egyptian Revolution. In movement after movement, this "resistance partnership" of strategic violence and mass street protest seems more the rule than the exception.

Indeed, Ketchley and his colleague Mohammad Ali Kadivar have sifted through all the democratic transitions that occurred between 1980 and 2010, and they found that as a rule, dictators are unseated by people who first come in peace and then, after running into the ironclad state and its repressive use of the police and the military against its own people, begin to swing sticks, throw stones, and hurl Molotov cocktails. They call this "unarmed collective violence." This type of violence, practiced by civilians with improvised weapons in hand, is not at all the same thing as the

violence exercised by a standing army with high-tech weaponry. But the weak, civilian-made weapons can be flung against repressive governments and used against property to smashing effect: it "disrupts the civic order and so raises the costs of ruling for the incumbent regime." Unarmed collective violence was used in the lion's share of power transitions, but ignored by our friends Chenoweth and Stephan, who had to omit it in order to generate their "twice as likely" finding in favor of pacifism. They hid the mad multitudes from Chile to Indonesia, Pakistan to Madagascar, Serbia to Iran.

The remaining question is whether it is possible to locate even one minimally relevant comparison to the climate struggle that has not contained some violence. Strategic pacifism is sanitized history in that it hasn't realistically taken stock of what has happened and what has not, of what worked and what went wrong. It has little to offer to a movement with mighty obstacles and horrendous hurdles to overcome. To leave out the militancy of past movements and paint a picture of pure civility warps our view of history into something very misleading. Furthermore, by trying to follow the example of a history that never really happened, we can't learn from past movements. We end up with fewer strategies available to help us win. In particular, the truly revolutionary politics and potential of violence that propelled so many past movements no longer really exist in movements today (at least in the global North). The militant power behind mass movements and uprisings, from the Haitian Revolution to the British poll tax riots, has been separated from how we think about movement building, as we see in Chenoweth and Stephan's work. But their analysis is just part of a larger trend that has erased or attacked revolutionary tactics to the point that in today's world, just bringing them up can feel taboo.

Much of the push to remove revolutionary politics from our understanding of changemaking succeeded with the rise of capitalism and its subsequent global dominance beginning in the 1980s. The world's current version of capitalism came about through two simultaneous developments: the end of the Cold War, which brought some global stability, and Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher's introduction of severe economic policies designed to benefit the wealthy (such as cutting business regulations and taxes), which solidified a new economic order for the world's elites.

The triumph of capitalism in the 1980s made it seem, as Thatcher famously argued, that "there is no alternative" to global capitalism.

Revolutions are clearly threatening to capitalism, which needs both stability and inequality to be preserved, so the claim that "there is no alternative" was part of a larger move to erase militant tactics from history and convince us that we are not capable of wide-scale change. In this way, capitalism is simultaneously killing the planet as well as our will to revolt against it.

The climate movement, meanwhile, finds itself facing an ever more dire situation, with few accepted tactics to fight back. This is a huge deadlock. To break it, we will have to learn how to fight all over again, in what might be the most ominous moment so far in the history of human habitation on this planet.

And here we arrive at the factor that really sets the climate crisis apart from other past struggles: time. When the suffragettes took to the streets, they had had enough of women being excluded from the government for centuries. From his Birmingham jail, Martin Luther King pointed out that "we have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given right," and explained to his white audience that "there comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over." Many if not most struggles in the past have existed in this time frame of exasperation—enough is enough, *¡Ya basta!* as Latin American activists say. But while the climate struggle is certainly saying enough is enough, its urgency really comes from the future, from the evolving prophecies and science of what might come. It's true that the worst has not happened—but the worst is on the way and speeding toward us.

One applicable comparison might be with German fascism (which is always the worst-case scenario for pacifists). In the early 1930s, it became clearer by the month that Germany was slipping down a slope that would end in the Nazi seizure of power. "How much valuable, irretrievable time has been lost! As a matter of fact, not much time is left," cried Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky in 1931, one of the many who warned of the danger and urged audiences to spare no efforts in combating it.

The timelines between the rise of German fascism and today's climate emergency really are quite similar: the climate emergency is already here, and the cup of endurance is running over—but just as with antifascists working to prevent Hitler's victory, we don't have much time to act. The danger is upon us. Now. Already.

Chapter 2: Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between moral pacifism and strategic pacifism?
2. Think about the different ways that strategic pacifists and the author approach the history of the suffragettes, the US civil rights movement, slavery, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, and the decolonization movement in India. How can history be used as a model for what people should do today?
3. Using one of the historical examples Malm lists in this chapter, describe how that social movement related to violence. In what ways was violence used as a tactic? Can you think of an example in which a pacifist strategy made it clear that violence should not be used? Which of these approaches was effective?

CHAPTER 3

BREAKING THE SPELL

At the time of COP1 in 1995, few would have imagined that two or three decades down the line, the economies of the world would emit nearly one gigaton of carbon per month, that corporations would busily plan to increase capacity to burn more fossil fuels, and that governments would rule over the entire process with pride. The lack of response to the crisis has exceeded expectations. At the same time, the responsiveness of the earth's own climate systems has also exceeded expectations: at the time of COP1, few scientists foresaw how soon we would arrive at the point that the land and the oceans would fail to soak up the gases emitted, become overfilled and disturbed, and start leaking and puffing carbon dioxide and methane at the high rates we're now seeing.

The northern zone of permafrost (where the ground is frozen year-round), for instance, is a storehouse of carbon, frozen for hundreds of thousands of years. When the planet heats up, the soil begins to thaw, and microbes set to work on the organic matter to decompose it, releasing greenhouse gases. That includes CO_2, but the main emission is methane—a greenhouse gas with eighty-seven times greater warming effect than CO_2 during its first two decades in the atmosphere. Because of positive feedback

loops, this process is now accelerating beyond scientists' previous predictions.

To understand the positive feedback loop of climate change—where the net effect of one process results in further release of CO_2, which builds on the initial effect and unleashes yet more warming—we can observe the effects of forest fires. Carbon locked into trees and soil escapes when the flames roar through the forests, and the warming climate creates hotter, drier conditions that let fires burn more often, for longer periods, and at higher intensities. So the primary combustion of fossil fuels from our cars and factories helps ignite forest fires from Siberia to the Congo, Canada to the Amazon. Scientists' understanding of these positive feedback loop mechanisms lags behind the actual events, so they struggle to account for them in their models and estimates. Carbon budgets set by governments have yet to fully account for feedback loops—and if they did, those budgets would shrink dramatically. In other words, if the thawing permafrost and growing wildfires and other positive feedback loops were accounted for, then we would have even less of a margin available to stay below 1.5°C or the unnerving 2°C. (Remember, beyond 2° we face irreversible consequences from our fossil fuel use.)

Carbon Budgets

Carbon budgets refer to the amount of carbon that countries can burn before putting the world over 1.5°C of warming. They can be calculated in many different ways, and countries are at odds over which countries and which industries should be given more or less leeway in the budget. Furthermore, precise forecasts for what we have left to burn keep changing as new data emerge about how global systems are responding to climate change. But regardless of the many unknowns surrounding carbon budgets, it is certain that they are small, and our remaining budget—the amount we can safely burn—gets smaller every day as we continue to burn fossil fuels.

Making a Global Prohibition on Fossil Fuels a Reality

So, we find ourselves stuck between two scissor blades: one blade is the unbending business-as-usual of fossil fuels, taking emissions ever higher and dashing hopes for meaningful reductions; and the other blade is the collapse of delicate ecosystems—and along with them, the resources we depend on. The unending growth of capitalist production systems meeting the reactivity of the earth. Snip … snip … snip.

This is the predicament in which the climate movement finds itself and that we have to resolve by creating meaningful tactics and strategies. In the words of the umpteenth scientific plea for "immediate global action," "even under optimistic assumptions," the pathways to a "tolerable future" are "rapidly narrowing."

In 2019, Dan Tong and his colleagues concluded that 1.5°C still remained "technically possible" on two conditions (though they were working with incomplete data regarding positive feedback loops). First, to have "a reasonable chance" of keeping to the 1.5° limit, human societies would have to institute "a global prohibition of all new fossil fuel infrastructure." Now, the likelihood of the ruling classes carrying out a global ban on all new fossil fuel infrastructure because scientists tell them to, or because billions of people would otherwise suffer grievous harm, or because the planet could very well spin into a hothouse, is about the same as them lining up at the summit of the steepest mountain and meekly proceeding to throw themselves off the ledge. That is not going to happen.

So here is what our movement of millions could do, for a start: announce and enforce the ban, and prohibit all new fossil fuel infrastructure, machines, and engines. Damage and destroy new fossil fuel devices. Put them out of commission, pick them apart, demolish them, burn them, blow them up. Let the fossil capitalists who keep on investing in a burning planet know that their properties will be trashed. "We are the investment risk," runs a slogan from Ende Gelände, but the risk clearly needs to be higher than one or two days of interrupted production per year. "If we can't get a serious carbon tax from a corrupted Congress, we can

impose a de facto one with our bodies," Bill McKibben has argued, but a carbon tax is so 2004. If we can't get a prohibition, a total halt, then we can impose an actual one with our bodies and any other means necessary.

That, however, would only be a start. The second condition for staying below 1.5°C—or indeed any other boundary between a tolerable and intolerable future—would be "substantial reductions in the historical lifetimes" of fossil fuel infrastructure and carbon emission sources. This means that not only new but also existing fossil fuel infrastructure—however young or old—would have to be deactivated. The science is perfectly clear on this point. Because so much valuable time has been lost—as a matter of fact, not much time is left at all—fossil fuel assets have to be stranded. Investments must be written off much too early for capitalist tastes. Fossil capitalists are going to lose a lot of money. By one estimate, the instant suspension of every project that is now planned would make the 2°C threshold achievable only if accompanied by the decommissioning of one-fifth of all power plants running on fossil fuels (mind you, this estimate is from 2018—the years of business-as-usual since then raise this requirement well above that one-fifth target).

That is a lot of already-operating infrastructure, a lot of sunk capital, a lot of already committed investments, *a lot of pipelines and coal plants to shut down*. One reason why climate stabilization appears such a frightfully daunting challenge is that no government seems prepared to even float this idea, because capitalist property has the status of the ultimate sacred realm. Who dares to throw capitalism on the scrapheap?! What government is willing to send in its forces to deny investors so much profit?

The Two Conditions for Staying Below a 1.5°C Heat Rise

1. Immediately enforce a ban on all new fossil fuel infrastructure, machines, and engines.
2. Decommission and reduce the historical lifetimes of already-existing infrastructure and emission sources.

So someone must break the spell: “Sabotage,” writes R. H. Lossin, one of the finest contemporary scholars in the field of communications, “is a sort of prefigurative, if temporary seizure of property. It is”—in reference to the climate emergency—“both a logical, justifiable and effective form of resistance and a direct affront to the sanctity of capitalist ownership.” In other words, as ordinary people, we can assert that our survival is more important than profit by physically stopping what is harming us. Refineries, coal pits, and other infrastructure can be shut down. Even if those closures are only temporary at first, we can slowly start to prove that the unimaginable is not only imaginable, but truly possible.

A refinery deprived of electricity, a bulldozer in pieces —the stranding of assets is possible, after all. Property does not stand above the earth; no technical or natural or divine law makes property untouchable in this emergency. If governments on their own will not stop the destruction, others will have to do it for them. Or property will cost us the earth.

The purpose of such a campaign against fossil fuel infrastructure and CO_2-emitting machines, then, would be twofold: one, establishing a reason not to invest in more of these assets, and two, demonstrating that the industry can be put out of business. So, to show that fossil fuels are a bad investment, we would not be required to disable or dismantle all new devices, only enough to reliably communicate the risk. We would need to be strictly selective in our choice of targets.

For example, there was a randomness to the property destruction undertaken by the suffragettes, which wouldn’t be appropriate now; if activists from the climate movement were to attack post offices and coffee shops and theaters, investors would not be dissuaded from anything in particular. No, this time we could focus our campaign to include infrastructure and large emission sources such as coal ports and yachts. But just as the suffragettes sought to twist the arm of the state—not able to pass voting rights legislation on their own, they needed politicians to enact women’s suffrage—the aim today would be to force governments to proclaim the ban on fossil fuel expansion and begin retiring the stock. To quote a 2016 article by environmental experts, “The current global energy

system is the largest network of infrastructure ever built, reflecting tens of trillions of dollars of assets and two centuries of technological evolution," and 80 percent of global energy still comes from fossil fuels. No one in their right mind would think that bands of activists could burn all or even one-fifth of that to the ground (or that such a burn pile would be desirable!) At the end of the day, it will be governments ramming through the transition or no one will.

But governments have fully proven that they will not be the prime movers. The question is not whether sabotage from a militant wing of the climate movement will solve the crisis on its own—that is clearly a fantasy—but rather: can we create enough disruptive commotion necessary for shaking business-as-usual out of its rut without a militant wing? What else has the potential of actually disrupting and reorienting business-as-usual? It would seem foolish to trust other methods and stick to tactics for normal times and normal movements. Recognizing the direness of the situation, it is high time for the movement to more decisively shift from protest to resistance: "Protest is when I say I don't like this. Resistance is when I put an end to what I don't like. Protest is when I say I refuse to go along with this anymore. Resistance is when I make sure everybody else stops going along too," as one West German columnist wrote in 1968, relaying the words of a Black Power activist visiting the country. We will have no shortage of objections to such resistance. Here's one to start with: Would it be technically possible?

A Short History of Pipeline Sabotage

"Pipelines are very easily sabotaged. A simple explosive device can put a critical section of a pipeline out of operation for weeks," the *Pipeline and Gas Journal* lamented in February 2005. At that point, the Iraqi resistance against the US occupation during the Iraq War had executed nearly two hundred attacks on pipelines. "The sabotage campaign has created an inhospitable investment climate and scared away oil companies that were supposed to develop its oil and gas industry," the *Journal* complained. To make matters worse, similar offenses were committed in the part of Kurdistan under Turkish control and in Chechnya; Assam, India; and

Colombia—where leftist guerrillas had pierced a key pipeline so frequently that “it became known as ‘the flute.’”

There is a long and esteemed tradition of sabotage attacks on fossil fuel infrastructure for reasons other than its impact on the climate. But because oil and gas are so pivotal to national economies, sabotaging pipelines can be a key strategy in wars and other struggles. The ANC in South Africa considered oil supply a weak link in the armor of apartheid. In the 1960s, the white-supremacist government set up the company Sasol to ensure it could maintain a sufficient source of domestic energy. (Sasol converted abundant coal to synthetic petroleum through hydrogenation, a chemical process that the Nazis had advanced significantly.) In June 1980, one of the most spectacular actions in the freedom struggle targeted Sasol: commando units from uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cut holes in the security fences around two hydrogenation facilities and planted mines in their tanks. The smoke plume, which lasted for three days, was visible to inspired audiences in Johannesburg. In the words of ANC militant Frene Ginwala, it “shattered the myth of White invulnerability. It was not about the quantity of oil that was lost … it was that column of smoke that was important. Sasol was a symbol of power.”

In Nelson Mandela’s assessment, the action contributed to the revival of the movement in the early 1980s. “None of these attacks,” one scholar of the MK asserts, “came close to bringing down the state, but they provided physical evidence of a tangible potential threat to the regime—reinforcing the sense, as Nadine Gordimer put it, that ‘something out there’ represented a shadowy threat to the long-term future of White supremacy.” The image of white supremacy’s permanence and strength had been broken.

But the pioneer of pipeline sabotage is the Palestinian resistance. In the wake of World War I, around 1918, European and American oil companies swooped down on the oil depots in the Persian Gulf. For the territory of Palestine, at that time under the rule of the British Mandate, the central industrial project became the construction of a pipeline, cutting straight from Kirkuk, in Iraq, across the Jordanian desert into the northern West Bank and Galilee and all the way to the refinery in Haifa, in modern Israel, from which Iraqi oil could be delivered to the world market. But when the Palestinians rose in a general strike in 1936 against British rule—the most formidable anticolonial uprising of the era—much of the action came to revolve around the pipeline. Two months after the strike started, rebels

blasted it for the first time. At the height of the three-year revolt, they tore it apart almost every night: set it ablaze or punctured it with potshots; along the sections where it was buried underground, bands of five or six would dig into the soil, expose the pipe, break it and throw in flaming rags wrapped around stones.

Forced to close the line again and again, the British colonizers were deprived of their main source of revenue and energy. Because it stretched unguarded over long distances, they were "unable to defend this vital pipeline, and admitted so," in the words of Ghassan Kanafani, the wordsmith of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). For everyday Palestinians, the actions were "enshrined in the folklore which glorified acts of popular heroism."

Sabotage along the same lines was relaunched by the PFLP in 1969. In May of that year, six PFLP fighters sneaked into Israeli-occupied territory from southern Lebanon, trekked across the mountainous terrain of the Golan Heights, and located an unguarded portion of the pipeline carrying crude oil from Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean. They stayed overnight, excavated the pipeline, planted an explosive device, and slipped away. Weeks later, another group infiltrated the refinery in Haifa and set off a bomb, and before the end of the summer, the PFLP had also demolished two high-voltage towers and a pipeline in the Naqab desert. *Al-Hadaf*, the weekly newspaper of the PFLP edited by Kanafani, explained that the aim was to "hit the enemy economically, specifically in the frame of oil production." In a recent historical reconstruction of the campaign of 1969, Zachary Davis Cuyler has shown that the PFLP understood oil as a material base for the hostile trinity—US imperialism, Israeli colonialism, Arab reaction—and sabotage as a way to "strike at the ligaments of empire."

Fast forward to 2005, the same year as the *Pipeline and Gas Journal* gripe mentioned above, and sabotage is still going strong, this time most extensively in Nigeria. After the nonviolent movement against the oil corporations ravaging the Niger Delta appeared to have hit a brick wall in the late 1990s, the organized youth of the Ijaw community and other groups made a bid to eject them by force.

In late 2005, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) made itself known by giving these corporations the ultimatum to leave or "face violent attacks." Starting a guerrilla war unique for its concentration on oil, MEND then undertook "a fantastically audacious

series of attacks," writes scholar Michael Watts. Activists moved swiftly on boats through the creeks and swamps to blow up pipelines, strike vessels, overpower offshore platforms, assault offices, and kidnap oil employees. The first in the series of attacks was called "Operation Cyclone." Between 2006 and 2008, when the insurgency stood at its height, MEND shut down a third of production in Africa's main oil-producing country. "The stable and regularized flow of oil," Watt observed, "was placed in question in an historically unprecedented way." For a brief moment, it seemed as though Shell, ExxonMobil, and the other producers were on the verge of withdrawal.

During the Egyptian Revolution, the Mubarak regime used a pipeline to supply the state of Israel with gas—at below-market prices—attracting a wave of popular rage. After ten sabotage actions closed the spigots, Israel canceled payments and the agreement broke down. An estimated thirty explosions rocked the pipeline in the period of protest that brought down Mubarak and ushered in the coup of Abdel Fattah al-Sisi. In India, the communist Naxalites have struck regularly against coal mines and railroad; in 2009 and 2010, authorities complained that the Naxalites were strangling transportation of coal and had established what became no-go zones for investors wishing to open new mines, which shaved off a quarter of the country's coal output. Among other actions in the summer of 2019, Naxalites attacked coal transports in the state of Chhattisgarh, set ablaze sixteen vehicles carrying coal in Jharkhand, and torched twenty-seven machines and vehicles at a construction site for a national highway in Maharashtra, plus a coal tar plant, with no end in sight. The Egyptian and Indian revolutionaries had little in common, but they did share a key similarity in that they both targeted fossil fuel infrastructure.

Then a new record was set in the Persian Gulf. None of the above actions came close to the effect of the drones launched by the Houthi rebels in Yemen—another country with a tradition of pipeline sabotage—against Aramco's refineries in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil processing facility, on September 14, 2019. The unmanned vehicles swarmed into the facilities to puncture storage tanks, light fires, and disable processing trains: in one fell stroke, half of the oil production in Saudi Arabia, accounting for 7 percent of the global supplies, had to be taken off-line. No single action in the history of sabotage and guerrilla war had achieved a comparable halt to the pumping of oil. According to a chorus of

experts, it heralded a new era and the end of lopsided warfare: now rebels could use tiny, cheap, toy-like planes to knock out pillars of the energy system. The business news site Bloomberg quivered. The Abqaiq action provided "stark evidence of the vulnerability of global crude supply in an age of disruptive technologies that can bring a century-old industry to its knees—at least temporarily." What could better embody the climate activist's dream?

Given this record of sabotage, past and present, the question is not whether it's technically possible for people organized outside of the state to destroy the kind of property that destroys the planet; it evidently is, just as it's technically possible to shift to renewable energy. The question is, why do these militant actions happen for all sorts of reasons, good and bad—but not to save the climate?

It is Lanchester's Paradox in the global South, home to the areas of the world most negatively impacted by capitalism and climate change. (And to recap, this paradox asks why, when we know so much, we are doing so little about such an overwhelming problem.) How does this paradox relate to the global South? While it is true that, relative to the global North, devices, engines, and machines that combust fossil fuels are spread thin in the South, the South is sufficiently crisscrossed by fossil fuel production infrastructure to be home to the world's richest forms of sabotage. The South reels under the blows from climate breakdown. It has the most to lose in the short and medium run, and popular concern over climate change is high, far higher than in the North, according to some polls. This is also the region where the memory of property destruction as a protest tactic is most vivid. Pipelines are blown up there, though not in the name of stopping climate breakdown.

Consider the country of Egypt. It is extremely vulnerable—the rising sea penetrates the Nile delta and spoils fields with salt water; the summer heat grows insufferable in Cairo; the harvests in Upper Egypt are predicted to shrink faster than in most other breadbasket regions of the world; the rates of evaporation in the Aswan Dam and the Nile are poised to spike—and yet the climate question is all but dead. Right after the fall of Mubarak in Egypt in 2011, with the popular revolt centered in Tahrir Square, we saw a tiny opening for popular engagement. Then the authoritarian regime led by Sisi that took over brought down the curtain and turned the country sharply toward more fossil fuels. Not only did Sisi revamp and reverse the agreement with Israel—now it would be Egypt importing newly discovered

gas from territories controlled by Israel—but he also made a dash for coal, planning for an eightfold increase in combustion capacity, overseeing construction of the largest coal-fired power plant in Africa, and perhaps the largest in the world. Early protests were snuffed out, an unhappy environmental minister sacked. Few countries have seen a similar recent spurt in the growth of committed emissions. Few are so blessed with renewable solar and wind potential, and yet, it is so criminally underdeveloped and underused (accounting for less than 1 percent of electricity generation in Egypt, under Sisi). Also, few countries have wind and solar riches combined with a recent history of revolutionary struggles that includes sabotage—but those struggles have been squashed.

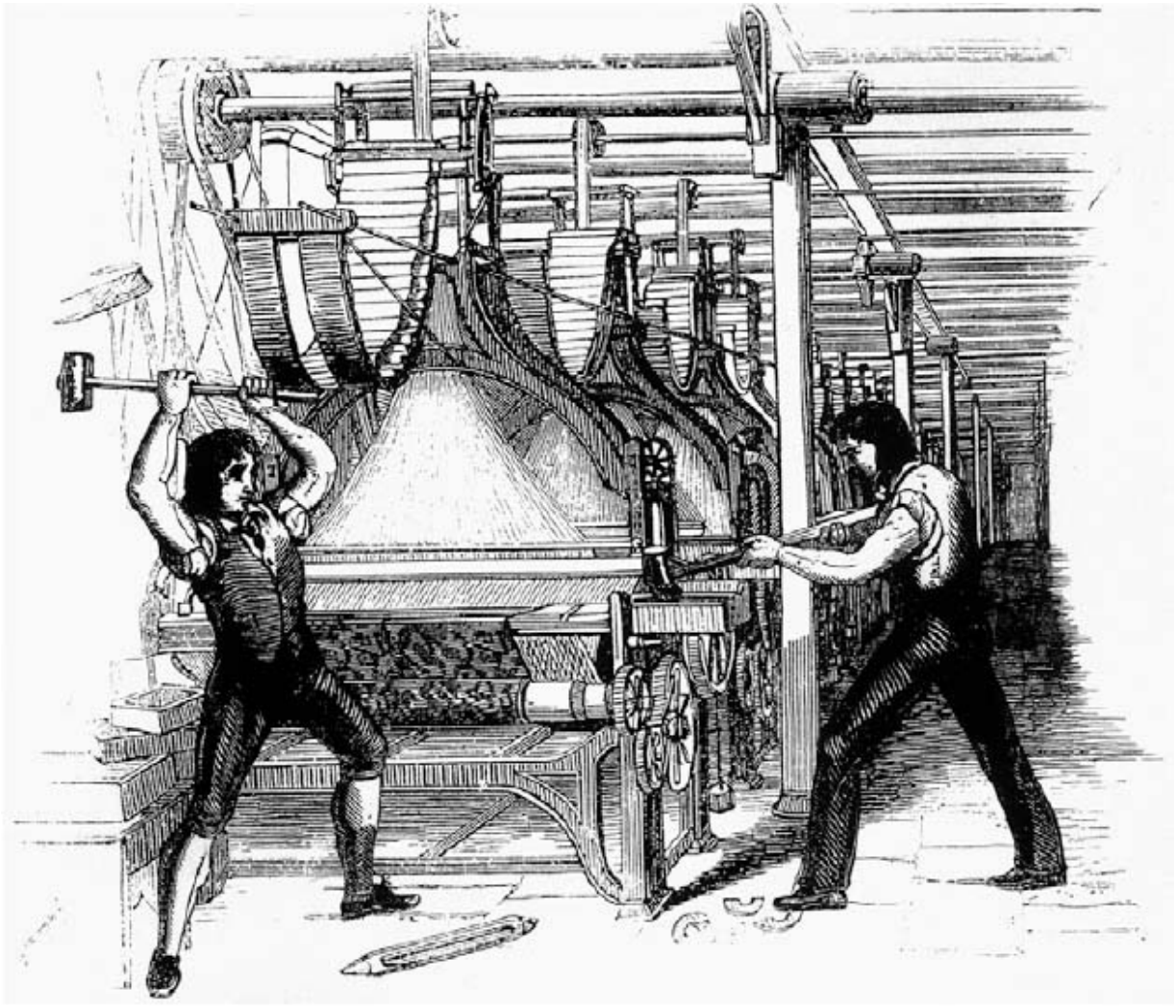
Perhaps one day Egyptians will stream into the zone of the Suez Canal to protest against the forces wrecking their lives, and some of them will veer off toward Sisi's coal plants; perhaps that could make a difference. But that day is too distant for comfort.

Other countries in the global South have similar riches of wind and solar. Iran lurches from one climate disaster to the next, has a ruling class of millionaire mullahs sitting on riches from oil and gas, and leaves the vast potential for renewable energy untapped. The country has a vibrant history of revolutionary politics, but it has faded in the years after 1979. The Fedaiyan is no more. South Africa, Nigeria, Colombia, and many others fit the broad pattern: countries ravaged by climate, with plentiful renewable energy potential, but all putting their money on fossil fuels.

The History of Sabotage in General

The history of sabotage, though, remains a fertile tradition, as old as industrial infrastructure itself. Sabotage developed in tandem with the Industrial Revolution, going back to the Luddites and the Plug Plot Riots in 1800s England and other working-class movements taking out their anger at the new mechanized working conditions governing steam engines and other new industrial machines. This only makes Lanchester's Paradox more mysterious. Devices emitting CO_2 have been physically disrupted for two centuries by various groups angry at the destructive forces—such as apartheid, colonization, and industrialization—that run these plants and

pipelines. But no anger has been directed at the destructive force of fossil fuels in and of themselves.



English “Luddites” smashing a loom in protest of the introduction of industrial factory looms, which were destroying their livelihood as artisanal weavers and creating inhumane working conditions. In response to their sabotage, the British Parliament passed the “frame Breaking Act” in 1812, which made destroying factory looms a felony, punishable by the death penalty.

Who Were the Luddites?

Today, the word “luddite” is most often thrown around as a disparaging term for people opposed to technology, and to industrial advances in general. But the historical Luddites were a movement with much more focused politics. They were a group of English textile workers who organized between 1811 and 1813, at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. They took their name from Ned Ludd, a fictional saboteur invested with Robin Hood–like qualities, whose name they often invoked in pamphlets and calls to action. As factory production became more common, the Luddites—who were skilled artisans trained in hand-loom weaving—saw the rise of factories as a threat to their livelihoods and to the skills of their trade. Not only did factories take work from the weavers, they also employed harsh, inhumane working conditions, and they needed many fewer workers to produce the same amount of textiles. This resulted in high unemployment, poverty, and instability in cities as the factory system grew. The Luddites foresaw this, and protested fiercely.

But the early 1800s were a dangerous time to fight for change in England, as the military was commonly called in to stop revolting workers at gunpoint. Without many options for fighting back, the Luddites organized themselves in secret to destroy the factory machines that were displacing them. They met on the moors at night, before advancing into factories, smashing equipment, and setting mills on fire. The government responded swiftly, sending the army after the Luddites and passing a law to make the crime of “machine breaking” a capital offense. In 1813, over sixty people were put on trial at once. They received the harshest sentences, including execution and shipment to penal colonies. Through this extreme oppression, the movement was suppressed. (At one point there were more British soldiers fighting the Luddites than there were fighting in the Napoleonic Wars being waged at that time!) But uprisings against the factory system didn’t stop, and workers continued to use sabotage as a tool in the labor struggle throughout the rest of the century.

Western Europe had its own moment of sabotage in the 1970s and ’80s, in solidarity with the liberation struggles in what was then known as the Third World. In 1972, Palestinian militants blasted a pipeline belonging to Esso—now ExxonMobil—near Hamburg, West Germany. In the mid-1980s, groups from the “anti-imperialist front”—Action Directe (France), Rote Armee Fraktion (Germany), and Cellules Communistes Combattantes (Belgium)—teamed up for a campaign against NATO pipelines traversing

their countries; a dozen pipes and pumping stations were blown up. As part of the international outcry against apartheid in the 1980s, activists firebombed gas stations of companies that continued to trade with South Africa, notably Shell stations in the Dutch province of Groningen. Shell stations were occupied and burned out in Sweden in the mid-1990s, in angry protest of the treatment of the peoples of the Niger Delta. But acts of sabotage for the climate? There was nothing of the sort.

One part of the explanation for Europe's non-action in recent years is the far right's virtual monopoly of political violence. During the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, in which right-wing Europeans railed against allowing Syrian refugees escaping civil war into their countries, ninety-two arson attacks were committed against refugee asylum centers in Germany—which provided the far right with a radical flank effect—pushing the government to close borders. A similar cluster of arson attacks coursed through Sweden, the EU country that received the second most migrants next to Germany.

And yet, not a single attack was registered against fossil fuel infrastructure in either country. It's a fact that, in the midst of this climate crisis, defies all human rationality. Property destruction still happens—it's just done by the wrong people for the wrong causes. But it doesn't have to come in the form of explosions, projectiles, or arson; it doesn't require the military capabilities of the PFLP, MEND, or the Houthis. It can be performed without producing a column of smoke. Sabotage can be done softly, even gingerly.

Deflating Tires

On a warm, quiet night in July 2007, the wealthiest neighborhood in central Stockholm received a visit from a group of young women and men who lived elsewhere in the city. Someone took their dog out for a night walk. Someone peered out the window before turning off the light. Someone wobbled home on their bike, but no one seemed to notice us as we walked up the stately streets, stopped and bent down, rose, and moved on. Along the sidewalks of the Östermalm neighborhood, the trail of hissing, fizzling sounds unfolded for hours. In the morning, sixty owners of SUVs found

their car tires deflated, resting on the asphalt. On the windshields, they found a leaflet that read:

> We have deflated one or more of the tyres on your SUV. Don't take it personally. It's your SUV we dislike. You are certainly aware of how much gas it guzzles, so we don't need to enlighten you about it. But what you seem to not know, or not care about, is that all the gasoline you burn to drive your SUV on the city's streets has devastating consequences for others.

And then we provided the ABCs of the climate crisis.

We pointed out that an affluent Swede—an SUV owner, for example—would be fine for some time, unlike poor people far away, those first to be pummeled by the climate storm. The worst of that storm could still be averted "if we slash emissions. Now. Not tomorrow. That's why we have disarmed your SUV by releasing the air from the tires. Since you live in a city with decent public transport, you will have no difficulty getting to any of your destinations."

ATTENTION – your gas guzzler kills.

We have deflated one or more of your tyres.

You'll be angry, but don't take it personally. It's not you, it's your car.

We did this because driving around urban areas in your massive vehicle has huge consequences for others.

Car companies try to convince us we need massive cars. But SUVs and 4x4s are a disaster for our climate. SUVs are the second-largest cause of the global rise in carbon dioxide emissions over the past decade - more than the entire aviation industry.

The world is facing a climate emergency. According to the UN, millions of people are already dying from climate change-related causes - drought, hurricanes, floods, forced migration, starvation. So far, the impacts on you have probably been minimal. We need emergency action to reduce emissions immediately. We're taking actions into our own hands because our governments and politicians will not.

Even if you don't care about the impacts on people far away from you, there's also consequences for your neighbours. SUVs cause more air pollution than smaller cars. SUVs are more likely to kill people than normal cars in collisions. Psychological studies show SUV drivers are more likely to take risks on the road. SUVs are unnecessary, and pure vanity.

That's why we have taken this action. You will have no difficulty getting around without your gas guzzler, with walking, cycling or public transport.

(Driving a hybrid or electric? These are still polluting, dangerous and cause congestion. See more on our website)

The Tyre Extinguishers

www.tyreextinguishers.com

A leaflet from the Tyre Extinguishers, a group that began in the UK and has now spread around the world, devoted to sabotaging SUVs to bring attention to the harm they cause to the climate. The leaflet is placed on the windshield after the tires are deflated, so SUV owners know what has happened, and why.

In the wee hours, we claimed responsibility for this first action in a communiqué to the press and launched a blog. There we encouraged others to get to work.

Learning from Our Mistakes

One mistake we made was signing our pamphlets “Asfaltsdjungelns Indianer,” which translates to “Indians of the Concrete Jungle,” alluding to a “Cowboys and Indians” fantasy. Looking back to 2007, that was obviously inappropriate, and played into a tired stereotype of Indigenous people, instead of pointing toward and aligning our group with the strong movements of Indigenous peoples around the world. In fact, the climate movement has a lot to learn from the rich history of those Indigenous struggles, which have mixed militant and nonviolent tactics as they pursue an end to colonialism and capitalism, and a reinstatement of a more respectful relationship to land. Our group’s mistake highlights how all activists and social movements can learn in the process of struggle, and the need for us to remain humble enough to admit our missteps. Learning from our mistakes through healthy criticism only makes our movements stronger and offers new ways forward.

The blog contained a list of images and names of the main SUV models—from the Volvo SC90, the best-selling model in Sweden at that point, to the notorious Hummer—and a how-to manual with a simple series of steps: Unscrew the cap on the valve of the tire. Inside, you’ll find a pin that will release the air if pushed down. Insert a piece of gravel the size of a boiled couscous grain or corn of black pepper, and screw the cap back on. With the little object pressing down the pin inside the valve, the tire will be fully deflated after about an hour. Don’t forget to stick the printable leaflet under

the windshield wiper so the owner can't miss the tinkering and won't drive off with empty tires, but will have a chance to ponder their choice. Avoid trucks used by artisans and workers, jeeps for people with disabilities, minibuses and ordinary cars, we advised. Aim straight for the SUVs of the rich.

Why target SUVs? SUVs don't serve any practical purpose—rarely do they leave their preferred soft carpet of the city asphalt—but they emit excessive CO_2 just to flaunt their owners' wealth. But the problem is more than just bragging and boasting: the exhaust from their cars kills animals and people the world over.

Well, our action sparked a wildfire of sorts: copycat groups appeared across Sweden in the summer and autumn. One night raid could take out two hundred SUVs in the inner city of Stockholm, with a communiqué following afterward; another raid could take out fifty in Gothenburg, or a handful in Växjö, or seventy in the posh Western Harbor district of Malmö. It became a media sensation. These attacks appeared at the start of the first cycle of climate activism, just before Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and national outlets rushed to cover the phenomenon and the local press printed reports about "the morning after." The weekend magazine of *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's main daily, embedded a reporter in a group that worked its way through "exceedingly SUV-dense quarters," hid when lit up by headlights, and continued in silence, operating as a coordinated squad in formation. This was understandable to many, cheered on and copied by enough people to prompt a backlash.

The tire-deflating groups became objects of fuming indignation. Our actions didn't even do any lasting damage to property; the mildest of nuisances, it imposed on SUV owners the loss of time and money involved in getting their car towed to the gas station or refilling its tires on site. But for some it was utterly horrifying. In their deflated position, the SUVs had about as much stature and purpose as a garbage bag, and their purpose—to flaunt wealth and status—had flagrantly been rendered null and void. It was too much to bear for a segment of owners. "If I would have seen you 'in action' I would have killed you," ran one of the death threats we received. Or, "I and many others put you on the same level as suicide bombers and pedophiles. Indeed I would have preferred to see some pedophiles released and the jail cells filled with your kind. Disgusting punks, read up a bit

before you run around like some fucking guerrilla." Internet forums for car owners, soldiers, and men's sports overflowed with revenge fantasies.

A blog appeared called *Cowboys of the Concrete Jungle* with pledges to deflate the lungs of the "Indians." This counterforce distributed stickers with the image of a boy holding a gun, above which read the words, "The air in my tires is private property—deflation is an assault on democracy." The magazine *Motor Life Today* published a piece on the supposedly ongoing distribution of firearms and live ammunition to SUV owners, warning that many were hunters and military men and expected "some Indians to bathe in blood any night now." The vehicles were said to be guarded by "grim men in dark clothes." (Always the grim men: never far below the surface, the terror of being even symbolically castrated was too much for the owners who saw their monster cars as symbols not only of their class but also their manliness.) And all of this in supposedly peaceful Sweden!

No violence broke out. Only once did a manly, everyday hero chase down an activist in an underground metro train, stopping the train (rather symbolically) and holding it until police came to arrest her. In late September, activist groups in Stockholm and Gothenburg responded to the threats with another wave of tire deflation, dedicated to the half-million victims of torrential rains and flooding in Uganda—in solidarity, to "strike at some of the most morbid emissions sources in the Western world."

In the first half of 2007, sales of Volvo SUVs in Sweden had continued their steady rise, but in the second half they plunged by 27 percent; other models suffered similar drops. We took some of the credit for this. When we drew up a balance sheet of the campaign in December, we counted more than 1,500 SUVs temporarily "disarmed," as we would say. A couple of reports had reached us of owners starting their cars in spite of our precautions; the approach of winter and the mix of snow and rain would mean slippery roads. We didn't want to put lives at risk. So we called off the campaign by announcing a "ceasefire," asking SUV owners to reconsider their car-buying options in peace, and pledged to restart the campaign at some later point. We then turned toward COP15 in Copenhagen. Our endeavor came to an abrupt end; tire deflation never resumed in the streets of Sweden. I consider that unfortunate.

Luxury Emissions

Our deflation of SUV tires was “direct action as prank,” perhaps too jolly and tender to deserve the term “sabotage.” All the fossil fuels burned in the decade since then should bolster the case for more hands-on approaches. And if anything is to be learned from this little episode, it is that if we use our imaginations, we can stop luxury emissions through easily available means.

But this raises an important question: why go after private consumption? Hasn’t the movement worked hard to shift attention away from the consumers of fossil fuels to the producers? Doesn’t pointing to consumers represent a slide backward for the movement? Corporations already like to do this, turning the focus to small actions like buying metal straws instead of plastic ones, which don’t match the seriousness of the moment and seem laughable in the face of fossil fuel companies’ own carbon emissions. This is the exact strategy that oil company BP used by popularizing the idea of everyone’s individual “carbon footprint”: it turns our focus toward consumers and away from the producers. The same exact strategy is used by the producers of plastics: it’s all about individual consumers making sure to recycle, rather than trying to stop those who are producing so much plastic in the first place.

But consumption *is* part of the problem, and most particularly the consumption practices of the rich. There is a very close relationship between wealth and income on the one hand and CO_2 emissions on the other. It has been demonstrated from Canada to China: a small share of the population accounts for a wildly outsized portion of the gas released. To be rich in the world today is to come out on top in the distribution of the “unequal ability to pollute,” as Dario Kenner describes it in his book *Carbon Inequality*. To be super-rich, to take it a step further, is to own multiple mansions, SUVs and luxury cars, yachts, jets, and helicopters and perhaps also a private airport, a private submarine, a private submersible platform serving as a floating habitat with every desired convenience and comfort. In his meticulous study of the wealth levels of different households, Kenner concludes that “all rich individuals in the US and UK have significant carbon footprints associated with their lifestyle.” He gives the example of Lord and Lady Bamford, who have a penchant for flying

guests to parties. In March 2016, they chartered two Boeing jets to take 180 friends on four days of sumptuous birthday celebrations in the palaces of Rajasthan, India.

As a group, such lifestyles create phenomenally skewed emissions. One OXFAM report from 2015 suggests that the richest 1 percent of humanity has a carbon footprint 175 times larger than that of the poorest 10 percent; but that figure is dwarfed by another: the richest Americans beat the poorest Mozambicans two thousand times over. A 2019 article published by Ilona M. Otto and her colleagues in *Nature Climate Change* states that the richest 0.54 percent of our species emit one-third more than the poorest half. Another study from the same year homes in on "superyachts," defined as yachts longer than 72 feet, often ranging above 200 feet. Only an estimated 0.0027 percent of humanity has sufficient wealth to purchase even the smallest superyacht models. Discounting other environmental damages—such as the January 2016 incident in which a superyacht owned by Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen crashed into and trashed 80 percent of a protected coral reef—this study calculates just the CO_2 emissions from the gasoline burned to move the superyachts around. The global fleet contains three hundred such yachts. In a year, that fleet generates as much CO_2 as the 10 million citizens of Burundi.

If you want to emit as much CO_2 as possible, well, the best way is to go on a flying binge—an experience familiar to the rich. One single flight from London to Edinburgh, Scotland, emits more CO_2 than the average Somali does in a year; from London to New York, more than the Nigerian and the Nepali; from London to Perth, Australia, more than the Peruvian and the Egyptian, the Kenyan and the Indian. Fifty-six countries in the world have lower annual per capita emissions than the emissions from one individual flying once between London and New York. These figures work on conservative estimates of the impact of aviation. Who spews this fire from the skies? Even in such a flying-happy country as England, 1 percent of the residents took a fifth of all overseas flights in 2018; 10 percent took half while 48 percent took none. But the super-rich prefer their very own planes, or renting one from Warren Buffett, whose fleet of luxury jets unsurprisingly generate massive emissions. The private jets operating in the US alone generate as much CO_2 as half of Burundi does in a year.

The questionable ethics of luxury lifestyle emissions have long been challenged. It was first pinpointed in 1991 in a classic essay by two Indian climate scholars and activists, Anil Agarwal and Sunita Narain, who took issue with calculations that treated all emissions as equal. “Can we really equate,” they asked, “the carbon dioxide contributions of gas guzzling automobiles in Europe and North America (or, for that matter, anywhere in the Third World) with the methane emissions of draught cattle and rice fields of subsistence farmers in West Bengal or Thailand? Do these people not have a right to live?” A given amount of methane from a cow or a rice paddy might have the same radiative force as a given amount of CO_2 from an SUV, Agarwal and Narain accepted, but the moral comparison is that of apples and oranges.

This insight was then picked up and formalized by Henry Shue, one of the most perceptive philosophers of the climate crisis, who developed a distinction, widely accepted by scholars and scientists, between *luxury* and *subsistence* emissions. Luxury emissions occur because rich people like to wallow in their wealth and status; subsistence emissions occur because poor people are trying to survive. If a poor farming family in India uses coal to cook their food, or lights up their house with electricity from a coal-fired power plant, they likely have no other alternative. Because they are locked in a fossil economy, they have little choice but to use the CO_2-emitting energy offered to them. Someone who enjoys a superyacht cannot be let off the hook as easily: they could easily abstain from their yacht without being denied a basic right or fulfillment of a vital need, in fact without experiencing any discomfort whatsoever. Subsistence emissions are simply the product of someone’s physical existence, in the absence of feasible alternatives. Luxury emissions can claim neither excuse. “People don’t need yachts—they want yachts,” in the words of the CEO of a top superyacht manufacturer.

Granted, the border between needs and wants is famously tricky, but to ignore the distinction in this context “is to discard the most fundamental differences in kind that we understand,” Shue argued back in 1993. He was grappling with the question of which emissions to cut first. “We ought,” he contended, “to start with the purely wasteful, frivolous, and superfluous emissions of the affluent engaging in activities they do not need to engage in.” Or, to state it another way, “even in an emergency one pawns the jewelry before selling the blankets.”

This argument was made at a critical moment in climate history: in the early 1990s, as the first COP summits were being held, governments were expected to reach a settlement capping global emissions. The thorny issue would be how to divide the emissions budget between rich and poor countries. Shue was one of many who argued that the poor could not be forced to slam the brakes on their development and give up the quest for modern living standards so that the rich could continue to fly high; basic decency and the core argument of social justice theory instead demanded that the poor be given a greater share of the emissions budget than rich countries so they could maintain a basic standard of living. It was to this end Shue made his distinction. However, two decades later, with COP summits still passively rolling us toward disaster, he was forced to admit that the earlier calculus no longer held.

If, back in the 1990s or early 2000s, the rich governments had agreed to a ceiling on emissions and a shrinking of their quotas—as pretty much everyone else demanded—the poor might indeed have been given some room. But no carbon cap was ever put in motion. Global emissions continued to grow by leaps and bounds. The rise in temperature on Earth is a function of the accumulated emissions since the time of the steam engine; the more CO_2 emitted, the hotter it gets, which is why we can draw up something like a carbon "budget" detailing how much we can spend until we've doomed ourselves. But now, after thirty years of drawing up carbon budgets—and thirty years of ever-increasing emissions—all reasonable budgets ever set are close to being spent. There is just not much room left for anyone's carbon emissions. No one, rich or poor, can have something like a right to emit, because all emissions must be brought to zero in no time. Luckily, this does not condemn the poor to eternal poverty, for what they need is not emissions but energy, and with the renewable kinds, such as solar and wind, now cheaper across the board, the transition does not require the sacrifice of their living standards or aspirations. But where does this leave the distinction between luxury and subsistence emissions?

Has it now lost its relevance?

On the contrary. Luxury emissions only become more atrocious at the tail end of a country's carbon budgets, for several reasons.

First, the harm they inflict is now immediate. Enjoying a day out on a steam yacht in 1913 was not yet a great offense, because relatively little

CO_2 had been accumulated in the atmosphere, the concentration still hanging below 300 parts per million (ppm); the yacht chimney's contribution to the atmosphere did not supercharge a hurricane or set a match to a dry forest. But when the atmosphere is already glutted with CO_2, extravagant excesses from the rich have exactly those terrible effects, which means that in effect, they act as a discharged gun whose bullets strike poor people at random. The rich could claim ignorance in 1913. Not so now. A group of American and British criminologists in the pages of the journal *Social Currents* have since argued that conspicuous consumption of fossil fuels ought to be classified as a crime.

The harm inflicted by the rich is aggravated by the fact that the main source of their luxury emissions—the hyper-mobility of the wealthy, their excessive flying and yachting and driving—is what frees them from having to bother with climate consequences, because they can always move to safer locations. To be super-rich and hyper-mobile is to play a major part in shooting global CO_2 emissions above 415 ppm, dump lethal toxins on others, and make a getaway from the toxins in one master stroke.

Luxury emissions represent business-as-usual's ideological point of the spear, not only maintaining but actively championing the most unsustainable kinds of consumption. This is crime sold as ideal living. Consumption among the middle classes is patterned on it, and the newly rich across the world are scrambling to join the 0.0027 percent. The damage to the planet can be attributed to those who continue to advertise luxurious living as the meaning of life, with all the resource depletion that goes with it.

The money burned on these luxury lifestyles could be used to help the victims of that same process. Ilona Otto and her colleagues point out that in 2017 alone—according to official records—forty-four individuals inherited more than $1 billion each, a total of $189 billion. And yet, a review of the four largest global funds that finance climate change adaptation initiatives shows that the projects they have approved only amount to a cumulative total of $2.78 billion. Forty-four individuals thus received sixty-eight times more unearned wealth than what the world's victims of climate catastrophe were allotted, and most likely, some of it went straight to superyachts and the like—not just ignoring, but actively adding to the problem.

The original insight holds more than ever. If we are ever going to start cutting emissions in accordance with basic reasonable principles, luxury will have to be the first thing to go. The more gigatons of carbon out there, the fiercer the clashes might be over whose emissions will be terminated first when the hammer finally falls. And that hammer will fall. We have as little room left as we have time to postpone the reckoning. In other words, we have no room and no time to delay.

This urgency drives the last consideration: luxury emissions have a very special strategic and tactical status, because they are highly demoralizing to any of our efforts to reduce consumption. Merely catching sight of a superyacht gliding through the bay, or hearing about the latest record in private tower construction, or reading about the still-soaring sales figures for the most gas-guzzling cars on the market is enough to crush anyone's hope that we will ever be able to halt emissions. If we cannot even get rid of the most obscenely unnecessary emissions, how are we going to begin moving toward zero? The more gases that accumulate in our atmosphere, the more critical this question becomes.

Yes, emissions from subsistence living must be dealt with just as much as any other type, but they have none of these features of luxury emissions in a CO_2-saturated world: gross criminality, insulation from climate change's worst effects, the promotion of wasteful habits, the withholding of resources for adaptation, and the flamboyant ridicule of the very notion of emissions cuts. A farm laborer who emits methane from their paddy or CO_2 from their stove cannot be held morally responsible for anything close to the same degree.

It follows that governments should attack luxury emissions with axes—not because those emissions necessarily make up the bulk of the total, but because of their obscene and blatant disregard for the rest of society. Otto and her colleagues propose "compulsory restrictions on household and individual emissions" to humble the rich. Granted, the likelihood of the ruling classes implementing compulsory restrictions on the consumption of the rich—on themselves—is of course about zero. Capitalism, as the criminologists note, is all about rewarding and adoring the very crimes of the fossil fuel age. Under the current balance of class power, the average capitalist country that wants to show it's doing something to tackle the

climate crisis will most likely start at the opposite end: with an attack on subsistence emissions.

This is what Emmanuel Macron, president of France and king of climate diplomacy and private luxury, did in France in 2018. He called for a fuel tax that would hit the working classes hardest. That in turn triggered the Yellow Vest protests (or the "Gilets Jaunes," in French, which shone light on the economic inequality baked into Macron's supposed "climate solution"). Rising rents and house prices had long pushed French workers out of cities and into the hinterlands, where public transport is persistently underdeveloped and owning a car is essential to commute to work and access public services. Shue's approach would have recognized and accounted for the unequal situation. But President Macron did not. The impact of his carbon tax was five times more severe on the bottom 10 percent of the population than on the top—effectively a regressive tax on subsistence, while luxury was released from all restraints by "le Président des riches." The tax backfired, as it should. But if other global North governments decide to take on climate regulation in their own countries, it is more than likely they will repeat Macron's blunders and tax the poor in one way or another.

Meanwhile, luxury emissions, long seen as the low-hanging fruit of emissions reduction, are left dangling, heavy and rotten, without any government daring to touch them. Time to pick up some sticks and knock the fruit down.

It might take attacks on luxury-emitting devices to break the spell in the world of consumption. Targeting luxury emissions would follow a logic much like that of divestment activists seeking to remove funding from fossil fuel projects: it is a way to bend public opinion of fossil fuels from approval to an ever-growing and healthy hostility. It would hammer home an ethical message that rich people cannot have the right to combust others to death. If we are to ever break that spell and take the only practical path for real reductions, then we have to start with the rich.

That path, however, lies at the outer edges of what we consider thinkable. We live in a society that encourages us to be like the rich, and makes it very hard to not continue consuming at the same rate. To break the spell, we might look again to Iran's revolutionaries, the Fedaiyan. They began their struggle against the Shah at a moment when the workers seemed to stand under "the absolute domination of the enemy" and felt an

“absolute inability to change the established order,” in the words of Amir Parvis Pouyan. In his essay “On the Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Refutation of the Theory of Survival,” he captured the suffocating atmosphere of a totalitarian regime that seemed unmoving and beyond popular influence. Could hope for change survive under such conditions? “We must take the offensive in order to survive,” Poyan charged.

> Acts of petty sabotage in locations, establishments or whatever else belongs to the bourgeois, bureaucratic and comprador enemy, in general the rich, would expand the spectrum of initiatives. These acts of sabotage, as they continue, will especially endanger the very things the enemy is extremely afraid of losing. The spell breaks and the enemy looks like a defeated magician.

No other text so jolted the generation of militants that spearheaded the fall of the Shah. For the climate movement, in other words, by targeting the places and items the rich use to show their place at the top of the hierarchy, we can break the power they hold.

It would be an easy mistake, however, to think that consumption is a problem just of the super-richest 0.0027 percent. Not even luxury emissions are limited to them. SUVs, for example, have conquered car markets, with stunning consequences for the planet: in late 2019, the International Energy Agency (IEA) reported that SUVs were the second-largest driver of the increasing global CO_2 emissions since 2010. The power-generating sector is the largest emitter, followed by the swelling SUV fleet, then heavy industry —cement, iron, aluminum —and then aviation and shipping. If SUV drivers were a nation, in 2018 they would have ranked seventh in the world for CO_2 emissions. The nonstop growth of SUV sales offset all gains from fuel efficiency and electric vehicles; these large and heavy vehicles continued to devour incredible amounts of gasoline, not to mention the energy required to manufacture the beasts. The IEA report did not include the manufacturing component in its calculation, but if it had, the amount of climate destruction would have been even more pronounced in the data.

All of this destructive energy is for a commodity that serves no recognizable human need: safety inside these tanks is mainly an illusion, as SUV drivers are far more likely than other motorists to crash, roll in a crash, and die. As the IEA noted, these monsters have sold so well around the world because “they are considered symbols of wealth and status.” Our planet is being burned by the rich, and by countless others who desire to be counted among them.

Sales have skyrocketed in the global North, a trend nicely symmetrical with the climate crisis. SUVs first grabbed the US, reaching 63 percent of car sales in 2016 (the seventh consecutive year of total sales gains—"an unprecedented string," according to analysts). In Europe, SUVs made their entry in the early 2000s, just before the first cycle of climate activism. By the end of the cycle, in 2009, they had taken 7 percent of the market. That share stood at 36 percent in 2018 and was projected to reach 40 percent three years later. Growth was no less marked in Sweden, where SUV sales jumped 20 percent in the five short years between 2013 and 2018.

Auto producers constantly roll out their new models and spend lavish amounts advertising them. But the movement is advancing as a legitimate threat to the auto industry. In September 2019, activists from Ende Gelände and other German groups mobilized twenty thousand people in demonstrations and direct actions against the Internationale Automobil-Ausstellung, the world's largest motor show, held in Frankfurt. Never before had the car industry been subjected to these tactics. It came on the heels of a series of lethal SUV collisions, most dramatically the killing of four people—including a sixty-four-year-old woman and her three-year-old grandson—by a man who lost control of his luxurious Porsche Macan and slammed into pedestrians on a sidewalk in Berlin. Calls were issued for the "tank-like" cars to be banned. After German chancellor Angela Merkel had inaugurated the show in Frankfurt, activists climbed on top of SUVs and unfurled banners reading "Klimakiller." Two months later the French newspaper *Libération* reported that one street in Paris's sixteenth arrondissement (*arrondissement* means "neighborhood"), home of French high society, had had its SUVs deflated in the middle of the night. May we have more such targeted strikes.

Defining Violence

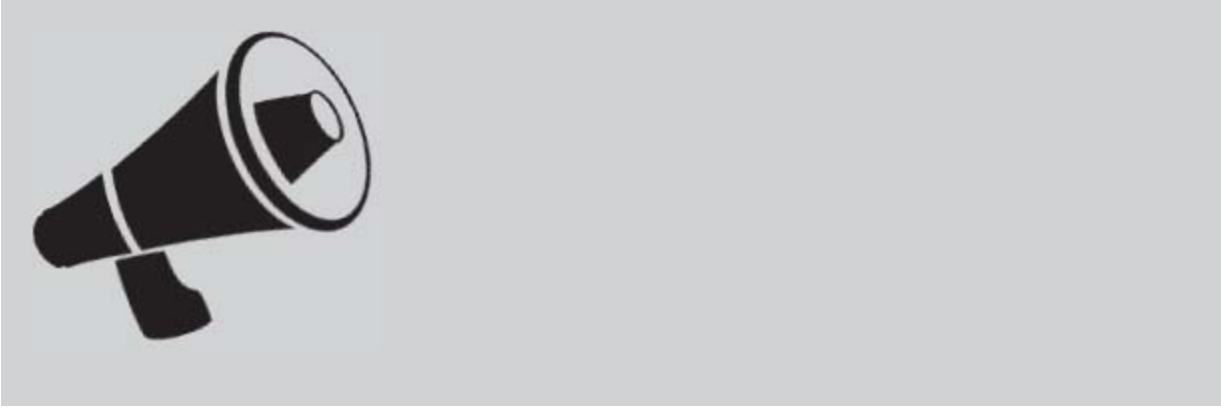
It is not entirely correct to say that the movement has refrained from damaging and destroying property. On the night Donald Trump was elected president, two members of Iowa's Des Moines Catholic Worker movement, Jessica Reznicek and Ruby Montoya, trespassed onto a construction site of the Dakota Access Pipeline in Iowa. They brought coffee canisters filled

with rags and motor oil, placed them on the seats of six heavy machinery units, and lit matches; five of the six units were burned out in the attack. Self-taught beginners in the field, Reznicek and Montoya then learned to use oxyacetylene-welding torches to burn through the steel in the pipes. With protective gear on, they raided the pipeline up and down the state in the spring of 2017 and pierced holes in it, compressing each hit-and-run strike into the span of seven minutes. Then they returned for arson. Equipment at multiple sites was set on fire with packages soaked in gasoline. The property they attacked belonged to Energy Transfer, a conglomerate of pipeline companies on whose boards one could find Rick Perry, secretary of energy under Trump.

Reznicek and Montoya had immersed themselves in the movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline centered on Standing Rock; they reacted to defeat not by giving up, but by moving on to the next phase. As the two Catholic Workers explained in their communiqué:

> After exploring and exhausting all avenues or process, including attending public commentary hearings, gathering signatures for valid requests for Environmental Impact Statements, participating in civil disobedience, hunger strikes, marches and rallies, boycotts and encampments, we saw the clear deficiencies of our government to hear the people's demands.

Eventually, they resolved to come forward and confess. "We are speaking publicly to empower others to act boldly, with purity of heart, to dismantle the infrastructure which denies us our rights to water, land and liberty," Reznicek and Montoya announced at a press conference. Their sabotage delayed construction of the pipeline for an indefinite number of months, but no matter how frequently they punctured it, two individuals, of course, could not bring down the juggernaut on their own. That would have required more people and more organization.



Standing Rock and the Movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline

The Standing Rock protests were a series of protest camps that temporarily blocked the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The pipeline, which is operated by Energy Transfer Partners, was slated to run 1,172 miles from the Bakken shale oil fields in North Dakota to an oil tank farm in Illinois. In early 2016, members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe set up a protest camp in the path of the pipeline after it was rerouted away from the city of Bismarck and toward the Standing Rock reservation. The new route put the pipeline on the tribe's treaty land, where it ran through sacred sites, crossed the Missouri River, and passed over the Ogallala aquifer—the water supply for millions of people. A pipeline leak here would be devastating.

Throughout 2016, protesters, who became known as "water protectors" and "land defenders," grew their resistance. The camp, known as Sacred Stone Camp, slowly swelled in size. The tribe filed a lawsuit against Energy Transfer. A group of Lakota youth, ReZpect Our Water, organized a two-thousand-mile run from North Dakota to Washington, DC, to call attention to the pipeline and deliver a petition with 160,000 signatures to the Army Corps of Engineers asking them to deny Energy Transfer its permits. But in August, the pipeline was given the green light and the bulldozers arrived at Standing Rock. Water protectors called for massive mobilization against the pipeline's construction and invited Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from around the world to come help block it. Around fifteen thousand people showed up, forming three camps that lasted for nearly five months. Each day, protesters trespassed into the construction zone to stop the pipeline's progress. They were met with intense repression. The security company hired by Energy Transfer used extreme tactics including attack dogs, tear gas, sound cannons, literal cages to hold detained protesters, strip searches of women in front of male law enforcement officers, and other military counter-terrorism techniques. In November 2016, coordinated protests in support of the water protectors were held in cities across the country.

In December 2016, while President Obama was still in office, the Corps of Engineers halted pipeline construction before digging began under the Missouri River. But a month later, under the new administration of President Trump, that decision was reversed, and the pipeline was completed in April 2017. Legal challenges since then have not prevented the oil from flowing in the pipe, but protests and lawsuits against it continue.

In Germany, the conflict over the Hambach forest came to a head in September 2018, when police moved in to clear the way for the expansion of a brown coal mine. A village in the forest's canopy first had to be torn down. Over several years, activists had built some sixty treehouses, up to seventy feet in the air, forming interlinked communities to live among the trees and permanently protect the forest. The police needed cranes to reach them. The first company contracted to remove the activists withdrew after misgivings among the staff, the second after public pressure. The third decided to rent out its cranes to cops so they could swing up in the air to catch the activists and crash their tripods, cabins, and two-story villas in

scenes that brought outrage over the brutal lengths the government would go to for coal. Then someone entered the warehouse of this third company and set it on fire. The action was repeated at another location.

Meanwhile, the German branch of Friends of the Earth frantically pushed a lawsuit against the coal company in the regional court, which, in a surprise victory for the movement, ordered a stop to the clearance pending a verdict. Fifty thousand people gathered on a field next to the forest to celebrate the reprieve and reassert the commitment to defeat coal; as of this writing, the treehouses are rebuilt, the communities inhabited, the groves still alive with insects and birds.

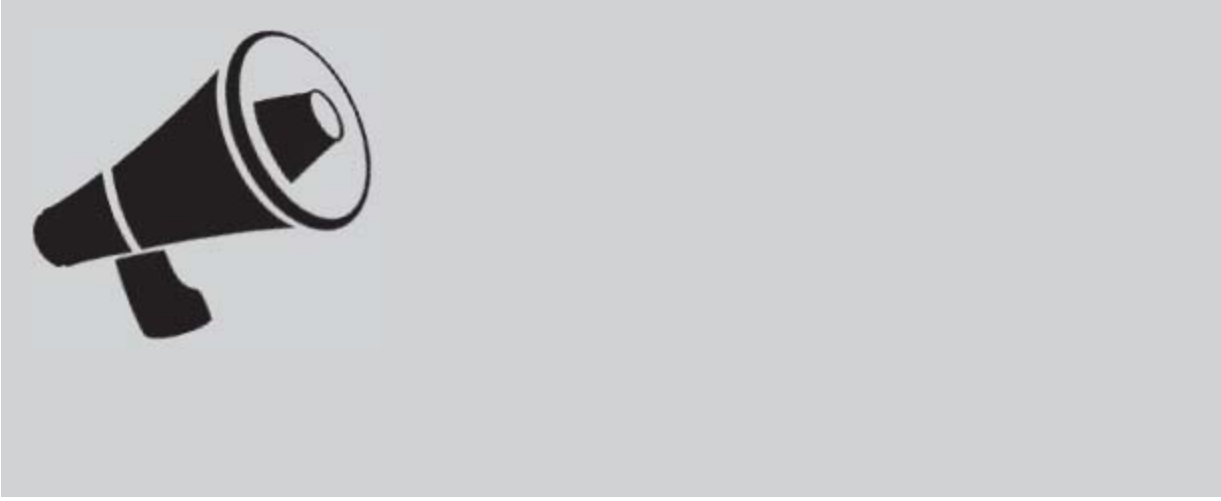
The Hambach tree squatters have been waging low-intensity conflicts against police and companies, sometimes doing small sabotage actions in and around the groves. The Zone à défendre (ZAD) in France used militant tactics in its successful struggle against a planned airport north of Nantes. Another few cases notwithstanding, the movement has by and large left property destruction an untried tactic. What if that became more than a one-off occurrence? What if hundreds or thousands followed in the footsteps of Reznicek and Montoya? On what grounds could sabotage on this level be argued for, or criticized?

One might argue that it would open up the possibility of escalating violence and terrorism. Reznicek and Montoya hotly argue that their actions in no way fall into that category: “The oil being taken out of the ground and the machinery that does it and the infrastructure which supports it—this is violent,” Reznicek stated in an interview. “We never at all threatened human life. We’re acting in an effort to save human life, to save our planet, to save our resources. And nothing was ever done by Ruby or me outside of peaceful, deliberate and steady loving hands.” In the Catholic Worker tradition, motivated by the example set by brothers Daniel and Philip Berrigan, who used blood and napalm to destroy draft files during the Vietnam War, and damaged nuclear warheads during the Cold War, righteous property destruction falls within the boundaries of nonviolence.

The position has Biblical justification. Jesus was no stranger to the tactic: the Gospel of John tells us that he became so infuriated at the sight of money-changers raking in profit from selling cattle in the temple that he used a whip to drive them all out, before dumping out their coins and overturning their tables. Some justification can also be found in non-religious philosophy. It has been argued that breaking the bone of a child

and breaking the legs of a table are not the same thing: only the child can feel pain. Only the child can be traumatized, only their dignity violated, whereas the table is devoid of interests or mental states. Physical force that harms lifeless objects does not, in this view, count as violence, because the results of the presumed wrong-doing are not what we could call violence. At minimum, for it to be violence those on the receiving end must be conscious beings.

Far more common, however, is the opposite view, which is that harming objects counts as violence. One much-cited philosophical essay argues that violence "is always done, and it is always done to something, typically a person, animal, or piece of property." The property class of objects—windows, vehicles, places of business—can be subjected to breaking, burning, stone-throwing, and an array of other such violent acts. But what about an ordered demolition of a dilapidated house, or the controlled burning of a garden patch? To meet the criteria, the physical attacks damaging or destroying property have to be "highly vigorous, or incendiary or malicious," with malice being the weight-iest factor. In a similar vein, Ted Honderich defines political violence as "a use of physical force that injures, damages, violates or destroys people or things, with a political and social intention." Remember Chenoweth and Stephan's argument for strategic pacifism? They hold that "violent tactics include bombings, shootings, kidnappings, physical sabotage such as the destruction of infrastructure, and other types of physical harm of people and property," which makes it even more impressive that they can name a single case of nonviolence. The fall of the Berlin Wall? Well, people didn't simply caress the cement before the Wall fell.



Catholic Workers and the Plowshares Movement

There is a long tradition of social justice activism and non-violent direct action inspired by Christian teachings. The work of Martin Luther King Jr. and Black religious organizations in the civil rights movement is one; the Catholic Worker movement is another. The Catholic Workers are not an official part of the Catholic Church, but instead a collection of around 240 independent communities dedicated to Christian pacifism and to upholding a Catholic tradition of social justice–oriented theology and work.

In the United States, the Catholic Worker movement was founded by Dorothy Day in 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression and the rise of war in Europe and the Pacific. With help and inspiration from the French Catholic activist Peter Maurin, Day began publishing the *Catholic Worker* newspaper, which brought attention to strikes and social issues. Beyond the paper, the Catholic Worker movement also opened "houses of hospitality" across the country, which provided food and clothing to help people meet their basic needs; these houses still exist today and remain dedicated to nonviolence and ending war and global inequality.

The Plowshares movement is an antinuclear and antiwar movement inspired by the Catholic Workers and Dorothy Day's protests against nuclear war, but moving beyond a strict adherence to nonviolence (as regards property, at least). They too have their roots in Christianity, and their name is taken from a chapter in the Book of Isaiah: "He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." The movement began in 1980, when brothers Daniel and Philip Berrigan—who had networked with other peace activists after being imprisoned for actions against the war in Vietnam—joined forces with six others and broke into a nuclear missile facility. They damaged nuclear warhead cones and poured their blood on documents and equipment as a symbolic gesture to remind society of the true purpose and effect of these weapons. Their tactics of disabling military equipment, combining pacifism and sabotage, inspired many others to follow suit. Over seventy-one Plowshares actions have taken place since, one as recently as 2018.

But strategic pacifists are right in asserting that in the eyes of the public, in the early twenty-first century and particularly in the global North, property destruction does tend to come off as "violent." Likewise, in the case of Jesus's cleansing of the temple, most people would call his whip a weapon and the act of chasing away money-changers and overturning their tables a minor whirlwind of violence. Certainly, one should not give in to an argument that has mass appeal, but neither should one give meaning to words that stray too far from common language. If we were to exclude objects from the definition of violence, we would have to try to convince the world that a crowd of Yellow Vests marching down the Champs-Élysées in Paris and smashing every retail store along the way would in fact be practicing nonviolence—which is a stretch, to say the least.

We must accept that property destruction has come to be considered violence, insofar as it intentionally exerts physical force to inflict injury on a thing owned by someone who does not want it to happen (such as Rick Perry and his fellow Energy Transfer shareholders, for example).

But in the very same breath, we must insist that that type of violence is different in kind from the type of violence that hits a human (or animal) in the face, for the reasons just laid out: one cannot treat a car cruelly or make it cry. It has no inherent rights that are violated when it is set on fire. Some harm does befall the person behind the car—the driver, the owner—who is prevented from using it as they wish, but it would be something entirely different to set fire to them, the owner.

Martin Luther King recognized and appreciated this difference in his critique of the urban uprisings of 1967: "Violent they certainly were. But the violence, to a startling degree, was focused against property rather than against people," and within the category of violent acts, this made all the difference. "A life is sacred. Property is intended to serve life, and no matter how much we surround it with rights and respect, it has no personal being." Why were the rioters "so violent with property then? Because property represents the white power structure, which they were attacking and trying to destroy."

How Would You Define Violence?

1. Would your definition include harm against lifeless objects as well as living beings?
2. The author suggests that we distinguish between different kinds of violence, as does Martin Luther King. Does this make sense to you? Why or why not?

In the standard view, which also seems to be King's, a lifeless object can undergo violence by virtue of being property—as opposed, that is, to a

human being, who can claim only to be indirectly hurt when the object is damaged. Destroying a rusty wreck of a car on a dump-site would hardly be violent, since no one is around to suffer the loss. But this fact of indirectness is also what sets property destruction apart, because the treatment of people cannot be equated with the treatment of things they own. Even a man deeply in love with his car has to admit that slicing up its tires and slicing up his lungs have very separate ethical consequences.

However, there is one exception, one type of property destruction that comes close to killing and maiming, namely that which curbs a person's ability to simply live: poisoning someone's groundwater, burning down a family's last remaining grove of olive trees, or, for that matter, firebombing a rice paddy field in an Indian farming village because it emits methane, would come close to an actual stab in the heart. At the other end of the spectrum of property violence is blasting a superyacht to smithereens.

Now if we accept that property destruction is violence, and that it is less grave than violence against humans, this in itself neither condemns nor condones the practice. It seems that it ought to be avoided for as long as possible. Even a revolutionary Marxist, who believes everything should be owned communally, should regard it as wrong, because personal property, even in a capitalist system, does provide for some human needs. We would not want a situation, for example, where people went around throwing bricks into cafés and toppling school walls and slitting coats on a whim, just for fun. Rather, highly pressing and important circumstances must exist for attacks on property to come under consideration. Then the balancing act begins: what kinds of property destruction can we consider to be ethical?

"Is not a woman's life, is not her health, are not her limbs more valuable than panes of glass?" asked Emmeline Pankhurst, when the British suffragettes were smashing shop windows to heighten the struggle for women's suffrage. Or, in the words of philosopher John Morreall, mulling over violent civil disobedience: if a grossly immoral war of occupation is being waged, the right of railroad engineers to keep the tracks in good shape may be overridden by "the more important right of the people in the country to which the troops are headed, to life itself." That is, the right of the people to destroy the tracks and prevent foreign troops from coming to kill them is more important than the right of the railroad to keep the tracks in working order.

We can apply these examples to our current situation of climate emergency. Moreover, because of the severity of the crisis, Pankhurst's question must also be posed from the standpoint of future generations: will those in school today or born next year grow up to think that the machines of the fossil economy were not given enough respect? Or will they look back on this moment in time rather in the same way we—or at least those of us with even minimal feminist leanings—look back on the suffragettes and see smashed windows as a price worth paying for women's ability to vote? In fact, it might make even more sense than the suffragettes' tactics, for when they broke windows, torched mailboxes, and struck paintings with hammers, these things had, in and of themselves, at most a small connection to the problem of male monopoly on the vote. Today, in the early 2020s, the machines of the fossil economy *are* the problem.

The Three Elements of Justified Direct Action

We can turn to contemporary scholarship on civil disobedience and political violence for further guidance. William Smith, one of the clearest thinkers on this subject, has recently turned his attention to direct action, defined as "occupations, sabotage, property damage and other types of force" designed to dissuade opponents from proceeding with their plans and stop them from repeating their efforts. He regards this category of action as distinct from civil disobedience, with its emphasis on moral persuasion. When could it ever be justified to use occupations, sabotage, or property damage? He sets up three criteria.

First, direct action should only disrupt activities that have the potential to cause serious harm. The time for direct action, according to Smith, is when the harm about to be done is irreversible, and the situation is too urgent for activists to wait for advocacy or protest to make their case. It should be noted that his argument is not focused on the climate crisis, or the direct action addressing it. However, the climate's impending doom already seems serious enough to meet this first criteria.

Second, Smith says activists must be able to show that mellower tactics have already been tried and that they led nowhere. They also have to show

that those tactics haven't worked because of the very deep and cemented nature of the problem, not because people just haven't tried hard enough.

Third, there should be a higher law or formal agreement that the wrongdoers have flouted and that activists can refer back to. Thankfully, in the case of climate change there are many: agreements made between countries from COP1 to the Paris Agreement and beyond, plus many libraries' worth of national pledges and plans that activists can point to.

But even if all three criteria aren't met, Smith allows that "the severity or urgency of the harm" may be enough that direct action needs no additional justification. And Smith's conclusions are not especially radical. There are many others who claim that under certain circumstances, the right to resistance can even become a duty. In fact, when the gravity of the climate crisis is fully accounted for, it is hard to see how it could not be considered a duty to resist. The argument against destroying the property that is causing the crisis seems flimsier and flimsier. And so far, no case has been made that property's right to exist is more important than humanity's.

What about the charge of terrorism? In Chapter 1, we saw John Lanchester look at a scenario where people who have keyed the doors of SUVs are labeled terrorists. Is that appropriate? Few other terms are as loaded, or as influenced by our media, as "terrorism." The term "violence" has a history as old as the mists of time, but "terrorism" can hardly be spoken without it conjuring vivid images, of "those people" and death and destruction on a grand scale. So, if we are to use the term for any kind of analysis, then we need a clear definition of terrorism. For example: the deliberate and indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians for the purpose of generating terror in a population. We have established that what Reznicek and Montoya did to pipelines was indeed violence—should we also label them as terrorists? If we use the definition I've given here, the clear answer is, unmistakably, no.

Reznicek and Montoya killed no one, injured no one, touched not a hair on anyone's head, so their act must be placed in a category farthest away from terrorism. It's interesting that anyone who would label them as terrorists would in all likelihood not place the same label on people who invest in or use fossil fuel infrastructure. So this puts them in a very curious position in which they deem something that harms no living beings as terrorism, and something that actually kills people as absolutely *not* terrorism.

This kind of upside-down thinking is not at all surprising coming from the guardians of business-as-usual. It has already begun. In preparing for the onset of potential property destruction in 2019, the Danish and Swedish intelligence services and their academic mouthpieces warned that "climate terrorism is on the horizon," in the words of scholar Magnus Ranstorp, who is known as the business-as-usual hitman for the repressive government apparatus in Sweden—and who has never uttered a public word on the climate question and, of course, has never referred to the combustion of fossil fuels as being in any way problematic. Ranstorp and his friends were concerned about acts like Reznicek and Montoya's. "One can easily imagine," one Danish expert suggested about the activists of the third cycle of the climate movement, "that they become frustrated with a political system that does not in their eyes take this matter seriously enough, and a small portion of them might resort to violent action."

Mind you, this is not to suggest that CO_2 emissions should be categorized as terrorism. That would also be a logical fallacy (use of faulty reasoning), because indiscriminate killing is central to what terrorism is—although, labeling CO_2 emissions as terrorism is less of a logical fallacy than labeling Reznicek and Montoya's actions as terrorism. No, the weight of the term "terrorism" should not be lessened, nor the crimes of terrorists made light of. Someone who enters a mosque with the intention of killing the maximum number of people is undertaking an act of terrorism; someone who drills a hole in a pipeline or sets a fuel depot on fire is doing something entirely different, "a categorically distinct act," in the words of Steve Vanderheiden, the leading philosopher of environmental ethics.

One could argue that the person punching a hole in a pipeline seeks to create an atmosphere of fear. Isn't the point here to *terrorize* capitalists into submission? But simply doing something that will deter someone else does not fit the definition of terrorism. Take for example the prison system, which exists to deter citizens from breaking the law by threatening to stop their freedom of movement; the same goes for invasive TV cameras in jails, armed guards, and a host of other completely normalized actions that have similar functions. Parents have told extreme and scary stories, raised their voices, even smacked their children to instill fear in them of unwholesome things. All of this can be objected to, but none of it can be called terrorism. The unique objective of the mosque killer is to create an atmosphere where Muslims fear for their lives and attend Friday prayer in the knowledge that

they could be killed at any moment just because of who they are. Fear for the loss of property is a categorically different fear. It pertains to one's budget, not one's body.

"Vandalism" would be a more appropriate term here, as would "sabotage," which we have used as a synonym for the damage and destruction of property as long as no blood is shed. Everything changes the moment blood is shed. This could happen by mistake or by design. It does not have to, however. In 2004, two scholars working for the Norwegian defense establishment searched through 5,000 recorded incidents of terrorism and found 262 cases of what they called "petroleum terrorism," defined as attacks on oil infrastructure and personnel, concentrated in the Middle East, Nigeria, and Colombia (of those attacks, just one had been conducted by environ-mentalists). Only 11 percent resulted in any casualties, usually one or two. When the attacks on people were removed, the casualties all but disappeared. The deadly attacks had been conducted mainly by Islamists—such as those in the Algerian civil war, which was fought in the 1990s—who felt little misgivings about shedding blood, whereas leftist and other non-religious groups tended to avoid attacking humans. The occurrence of deaths and injuries in conjunction with "petroleum terrorism" could therefore "be explained by differences in ideology," the Norwegians concluded. But that doesn't mean that Islamists generally kill when they attack oil: the drones that dove into Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia, the world's largest attack on fossil infrastructure, did not produce a single recorded bodily injury, for example.

The fine art to be mastered here is that of controlled political violence. When the townships in South Africa boiled with anger after the Sharpeville massacre, Nelson Mandela tried to convince his fellow ANC leaders that "violence would begin whether we initiated it or not. Would it not be better to guide this violence ourselves, according to principles where we saved lives by attacking symbols of oppression, and not people?" When Mandela weighed the options, they included terrorism and guerrilla warfare, but "terrorism inevitably reflected poorly on those who used it. Guerrilla warfare was a possibility, but since the ANC had been reluctant to embrace violence at all, it made sense to begin with the form of violence that inflicted the least harm against individuals: sabotage."

At the moment of this writing, when the climate movement's third cycle is steadily coursing upward, in a political climate still haunted by al-Qaeda

and ISIS, it would be catastrophic for the movement if any part of it used terrorism. The same goes for unintended casualties and injuries. The moral high ground that has been built could be destroyed in a single blow. If killing has bad consequences even for the right cause, then any climate militant who contemplates sabotage should abide by the original rule of the MK "not to endanger life in any way."

The militant activist should take care to warn people of the risk of injury where applicable, abstain from harassing or intimidating anyone, and take precautions to avoid damage to the environment. Will such restraints always be followed and be guaranteed to protect humans from violence? Well, no. Like all tactical choices, they must be made in the moment, often in a heated moment. Reznicek and Montoya are good examples in this regard, dismantling fossil fuel infrastructure with "steady loving hands."

Answering Objections

I once asked Bill McKibben, after he gave an energizing activist speech to a capacity crowd, when—given that the situation is as urgent as he portrayed it and we all know it is—do we escalate our tactics? He was visibly ill at ease. The first part of his response laid out an objection based on an analysis of unequal power: as soon as a social movement engages in violent acts, it moves into the terrain favored by the state, which is overwhelmingly superior in military capabilities. Entrenched governments love a fight of arms; they know they will win. Our strength, on the other hand, is our numbers. This is a pet argument for the strategic pacifists, but it is deceptive because violence is not the only field where unequal power prevails. The enemy has overwhelmingly superior capabilities in virtually all fields, including media and propaganda, institutional coordination, logistical resources, political power, and, above all, money. If the movement gave up on every uphill battle, then it would deem a divestment campaign to halt funding for fossil fuel companies a tactic destined to fail. We can't, this argument goes, try to beat fossil capital by using capital! And yet, divestment remains a valid, useful tactic for climate activists.

We have a long history of the powerless taking on a formidable opponent using ingenious tactics, finding cracks in the armor of the all-

powerful enemy. As part of the mass resistance in the besieged Gaza Strip in the spring of 2018, Palestinians invented techniques for sending kites and helium-inflated condoms carrying incendiary materials across the border wall to burn Israeli property. The most powerful country in the Middle East, armed to the teeth with atomic bombs and sophisticated systems for intercepting rockets, stood helpless to stop these missiles from a thoroughly deprived people. In the popular uprisings that swirled across the globe in 2019, not only did crowds smash the windows of boutique shops in Beirut, Lebanon, with iron bars, set fire to SUVs in the posh neighborhoods overlooking Port-au-Prince, Haiti, throw themselves into ferocious clashes with police in Quito, Ecuador—the large pipeline in Ecuador shut down after Indigenous protesters "disrupted" it—and burn banks and official buildings in Iran and Iraq, ripping up the civil resistance model day after day. They also used creative forms of warfare that didn't rely on guns. In Santiago, Chile, they used up to fifty handheld lasers to bring down police drones from the sky. In Hong Kong, they filled streets with "mini Stonehenges"—one brick laid horizontally over two standing bricks—to block the path of police vehicles, and built giant wooden catapults, medieval-style, to fling Molotov cocktails toward the lines of the Chinese government. No law says that in the face of a power imbalance the state can never be overturned from below, nor that violence is destined to hurt the credibility of a mass movement. Rather, unarmed, collective violence is simply one expression of a movement's strength, one way of bringing down the seemingly invincible. Property destruction has always been an essential part of collective resistance. Can this type of resistance ever be part of the climate struggle? Only if the movement first gets over the taboo against it.

McKibben laid out a second objection to taking the next step: we have not yet spent enough time attempting strict nonviolent tactics. We have to be patient. We must give perfectly civil disobedience another chance and slowly reap the gains, for many more years if needed. We must not, this argument goes, give up on the power of nonviolent civil disobedience too soon. But in this case, any charge that the movement is being rash isn't going to fly. In fact, the opposite is more true: the movement has been infinitely patient. "We live in a dream world," George Monbiot once observed.

> Our dreaming will, as it has begun to do already, destroy the conditions necessary for human life on Earth. Were we governed by reason, we would be on the barricades today, dragging

> the drivers of Range Rovers and Nissan Patrols out of their seats, occupying and shutting down the coal-burning power stations, bursting in upon the Blairs' retreat from reality in Barbados and demanding a reversal of economic life as dramatic as the one we bore when we went to war with Hitler.

Those words were written in 2003.

But not everyone can mix a Molotov cocktail or fill a coffee canister with motor oil! Which brings up the third objection to escalating our approach: accessibility. Those in the climate movement assert that nonviolence is attractive to the majority of people, so violence should be avoided. Mass participation is, in fact, a highly valuable asset, and with the benefit of hindsight, Chenoweth and Stephan are correct in claiming that "barriers to participation are much lower for non-violent resistance than for violent insurgency." The festive atmosphere in a city square taken over by protesters has more to speak for it and less to scare people away than the mayhem of a stone-throwing assault. This is one reason why one, nonviolent mass mobilization should (where possible) be the first resort, and militant actions the last; and two, no movement should ever voluntarily give up on non-violent mass mobilizations. Rather, we are arguing that we should not limit ourselves to *only* that type of action.

That said, the mass appeal of civil disobedience etiquette can be overblown. In the third climate cycle, Extinction Rebellion (XR) went out of its way to shower the police with love. "Police, we love you—it's for your children too," went a common chant in London. After the action in Malmö, Sweden, in September 2019, the local branch of XR posted a picture of an activist and a cop having a warm moment, all smiles and affection, and confirmed that "at the end of the day, we're all in the same boat." In the XR handbook, we learned that Rebels should seek to "actively try to get arrested" and that this desire is "at the heart of Extinction Rebellion." Well, this appeals to *some* people. As pointed out in an open letter to XR after the London "Spring Uprising" in 2019, written by the Wretched of the Earth, a network of climate activists of color, together with Ende Gelände, the Hambach forest occupation, and a number of other allies, throwing yourself into the arms of the police is a sign of privilege. Middle-class white people can count on the good manners of the cops; working-class Muslims, Black and Brown people, and migrants without papers don't have that assurance—a hesitancy born out of experience.

This might be one reason why, during XR's first year of existence, the group looked much whiter than the wider population in cities like London and Malmö. Others would feel called to a more confrontational or evasive approach to the repressive government machinery. At the end of the day, as the Wretched of the Earth claimed, we are too many and too diverse to fit into one boat: the only vessel that can make room for the level of participation required to win this "fight of our lives" is "a diversity and plurality of tactics." True, such diversity and plurality will expose internal tensions among movements—but no movement that has altered the course of history has done it without them.

Anyway, there is something suspicious about total tactical conformity: movements are more democratic, more effective, and stronger when they rely on multiple strategies and tactics.

Another objection, which you will remember from our survey in the previous chapter of movements against dictatorships, holds that violence is counter to the goal of peaceful, constitutional processes. If the enemy is beaten up or worse, then they won't feel invited to switch sides, or even have a place at the table, as they rightfully ought to be have when the nation reorganizes itself. (Chenoweth and Stephan add that foreign investors will be frightened away as well.) But this objection loses all validity when violence against property is the only tactic considered, because, as another philosophy has explained, "seizing and destroying the gold-encrusted jet of a plutocrat is an eminently striking and symbolic form of protest." In this philosopher's way of thinking, "given that the plutocrat himself is not threatened," no invitation to the table is withheld, and so nothing anti-democratic has taken place.

Another objection from McKibben is the "popular support" objection. According to this line of reasoning, as soon as violence is thrown into the mix, popular support for a cause evaporates because supporters are scared away. The movement can win sympathy by joining hands and encircling the White House, or blocking a gas terminal with a fleet of canoes, or staging a die-in in a natural history museum, but it will only repel the public by burning things or clashing with cops. Now, clearly there is a grain of truth to this, particularly in the US.

In France, however, it is different. A French social movement does not automatically become outcast if it spices up mass mobilization with some property destruction and rioting: we don't witness only one type of reaction

to violence, even in the global North. Rather, we face another paradox: the US is a far more violent society overall than France—as measured by the number of guns spread throughout American society, the incidents of mass shootings, the civilians killed by police, the admiration of armed heroes in pop culture, the aggressiveness of the government, and basically any other measure—and yet intolerance for violence committed by social movements is at its highest in the US. But upon further reflection, the contradiction clears up: the government carefully monitors, regulates, and controls the use of violence by protest movements precisely *because* US society is so violent and has such a violent history. The general fear of violence—not violence from the state, but from its people—is then reinforced by popular opinion and "common sense."

France, on the other hand, has a legacy and continuing practice of popular struggle and upheaval, and has a comparatively combative working class. So, France's tolerance for low-level violence stands in stark contrast to the US and its landscape of absolute capitalist dominance backed up by state violence to maintain social order. The American condition, in other words, is marked by a deeper sickness.

Americans, however, aren't the only ones who live in sick societies, and activists obviously have to learn how to behave within their society without instantly alienating their intended audiences. But neither should American activists assume the public's fear of even the softest levels of sabotage to be a natural fact. The public's receptiveness to different protest tactics can vary with each new situation we find ourselves in. In the case of the climate movement, more and more individuals and whole sectors of society are realizing the seriousness of the emergency.

Every report that comes out only reinforces this fact. If in the still-not-so-hot year of 2007, activists could deflate SUV tires in Sweden without suffering any losses in support for the climate movement, then what forms of sabotage would just about any society condone in 2025, or 2040? At three degrees of global heating, the itch to blow up pipelines would be pretty much universal among whatever remnant of humankind remains at that point.

So instead of the idea that there is a hard and fast intolerance among the general public for property destruction, we should put forward the idea that acceptance to such tactics will rapidly rise in a rapidly heating world. To argue anything else would be to assume that we have a species-wide death

wish. If fossil fuels continue to be burned, and temperatures continue to climb, then physical attacks on the sources of these killer fuels will start to make more and more sense to broader and broader segments of society. The only thing that could interfere with this tendency would be an actual halt to business-as-usual, a widespread enactment of the Green New Deal or similar policy package that would bend the curve of emissions and move it toward zero. This would of course be the best-case scenario, and we should contribute all our efforts to this end.

If we don't start enacting real CO_2-reducingpolicies, however, society will be much more ready to support more radical activism. Climate breakdown does not go into hibernation like a bear in the winter, only to emerge again in the spring. No, climate breakdown has no rest period; each season brings new dangers, new feedback loops, and cascading effects beyond human negotiation. And because of these new and increasing dangers, the typical predictions about how society is going to react no longer apply.

The problem, of course, is that blowing up a pipeline in a world of four-degree warming would be acting too late in the day. In light of these realities, should we wait for approval from a large majority of climate activists before a segment the movement turns to property destruction? A simple majority? A large minority? The task of activists is not to take the current level of concern as a given, but rather to stretch the status quo. They should walk ahead—not too far from everyone else, which would lead to isolation and thus be counterproductive, but neither should they stay in the middle or lag at the rear. Activists also must be prepared to be denounced, back-stabbed, and slandered by those in power (anything else would be proof of being ineffective), while steering clear of tactics that would be off-putting for too many ordinary people—this is the tightrope walked by the vanguard of every movement. Actions should only be taken if it's clear that explaining the plan, goals, and follow-through will help gain broader support and move people's thinking forward. This is one reason why it would be a very bad idea to assassinate a coal executive or fly a plane into an ExxonMobil skyscraper: harming human life is not only ethically abhorrent, but would destroy popular support of the movement's goals.

Intelligent sabotage is vastly different than mindless property destruction. It should be explainable and acceptable to enough people; and if not today, then surely after a little more climate breakdown. Timing,

patience, and target choice are of the essence. Every extreme weather event now blows with the force of accumulated emissions and gives a taste of misery to come. That can be the moment to strike and to stretch: next time the wildfires burn through the forests of Europe, take out a bulldozer. Next time a Caribbean island is battered beyond recognition, burst in on a banquet of luxury emitters or a Shell board meeting. This is part of Lanchester's Paradox: climate activists still have to time their actions to singular climate catastrophes, and sadly, there is no reason to believe we will not run out of them.

Our collective day-to-day experiences may quickly move the goalposts for what are considered moderate actions, similar to how the goalposts moved during the civil rights era: Martin Luther King appeared radical in the 1950s, at the beginning of the civil rights era. Extinction Rebellion appeared radical in 2019. As we have discussed, a radical flank, or militant wing, can help shift what people consider acceptable as tactics and positions in a protest movement. Suddenly, those previously radical positions seem moderate. In addition to opening the gates for more sabotage, this means that now-moderate positions are taken more seriously by those in power. That has the potential to be very good for the movement. For example, imagine if representatives of XR sat down with the British government to negotiate a path to zero emissions by 2025 (perhaps the government ministers would insist on 2028). That might lead to actual progress, made possible by the existence of a radical flank.

Ultimately, if mainstream, pacifist climate groups do in fact want to reach the negotiating table, they might need a little unasked-for help from the direct-action side of the movement. Scholar Herbert Haines says that a positive radical flank effect assumes "a division of labor in which moderates and radicals perform very different roles": the radical flank stokes up the fires of the crisis to the breaking point, and the moderates then offer a way out. In other words, we do not need to convince XR or Bill McKibben, or any other part of the movement committed to absolute nonviolence, to pick up Molotov cocktails or tear gas canisters—it's not their job.

However, Haines and others have shown that the risk of a negative radical flank effect is very real. Pushing too hard for radical change can make a movement look so distasteful that it denies the movement any influence. There is no lack of examples of movements shooting themselves

in the foot. Because of the magnitude of the stakes in the climate crisis, negative effects could have ruinous consequences for us all. So, militant flanks of the climate movement need to be especially careful and mindful of some principles laid down by, for instance, William Smith: practitioners of direct action are responsible to their "community of opinion" and bound by the duty to advance the overall cause, not set it back. They should dive into a campaign of property destruction on condition of being prepared to adjust it or call it off if it has become clear that it will draw too much retaliation, condemnation, or embarrassment for the movement.

Moderates vs. Radicals?

Building a movement in which one group maintains an air of respectability is useful and may be how we begin to see change. But while the mainstream groups need to separate themselves tactically from more radical actions in order to appear legitimate in the eyes of those in power, they must not cave in to pressure to weaken their demands. If the voices at the table are only discussing moderate solutions that don't threaten the status quo, they might as well not be there at all.

When governments feel threatened by a radical faction—or indeed by anything that hints that a disruptive movement could actually *win*—they will do all they can to minimize its effects. Certainly, they will try to repress activists. But in movement after movement, we have also seen governments agree to lesser demands in order to appease protesters or divide them into competing camps. This was the case in the civil rights era, when the threat from the Black Power movement, as well as the need to distinguish US-style democracy from the authoritarian government of the Soviet Union (now Russia) in Cold War politics, forced the US government to quickly sign civil rights legislation into law. This could be considered a win, but looking back on that movement, we see that many of its greater demands were not met, and on-the-ground realities remained, like the entrenched poverty of many Black communities in Northern cities, and a real estate practice called "redlining" that prevented African Americans from owning homes in many desirable neighborhoods. The Civil Rights Act of 1968 also included language that defined a riot as any action where three or more people threatened the use of violence. This led to targeted arrests of civil rights leaders, even those committed to nonviolent tactics. Indeed, the US still struggles greatly with racist laws and policing to this day. As we debate how to

tackle the climate crisis, we cannot afford for the climate movement to be similarly led astray by powerful hands holding out half-solutions and false promises.

Radical tactics are not for everyone, nor should they be. But at this late stage, we must be clear that we do need radical and immediate *change*, and we need everyone to be asking for it. As such, the radical flank should be prepared to push the moderates to demand more radical change *without* asking them to condone more radical tactics, and should even expect they won't condone them.

This, however, presents militants with a genuine dilemma. On one hand, they have to anticipate that the mainstream will distrust or disown them—the media is entrenched in the capitalist world, after all, and those in power will do all they can to stop a movement with real teeth—but on the other hand, they must not push so hard they damage the reputation of the movement as a whole. When should they ignore the mainstream scolding and proceed? When should they hear people's concerns and adjust accordingly? It is certainly a tightrope act! But then, no one said militancy would be simple or easy.

This same logic applies to the inevitable objections with regard to government repression. Why provoke the government to impose brutal measures on the movement? In October 2019, Jessica Reznicek and Ruby Montoya were indicted on charges that carried a sentence of up to 110 years in prison. In June 2021, Reznicek was sentenced by US District Court Judge Rebecca Goodgame Ebinger to eight years in federal prison, and must pay $3.2 million in restitution. Even eight years in prison is a harsh price to pay, and saboteurs should not expect lighter treatment. Beyond government repression, Reznicek and Montoya also received death threats in response to their actions. The CEO of Energy Transfer himself took aim at the two, saying, "I think you're talking about somebody who needs to be removed from the gene pool." Reznicek and Montoya knew they were risking the most severe punishment for their acts of resistance, and were ready to pay the price.

Should these principled activists be scolded for their risky choice? In their argument against violent resistance, Chenoweth and Stephan assert that it requires "high levels of both commitment and risk tolerance" from its practitioners, which cannot be expected of everyone. But seen from another angle, the sacrifice is a signal to others that this is something worth fighting for, even worth spending many years, or one's life, in prison for. The climate movement could do with more acts of that scope and quality, and

with more activists who have the bravery, honor, and integrity that Reznicek and Montoya showed. So far, few have been prepared to risk more than a couple nights under arrest. Compared with what protesters in history have gone through, most climate activists in the global North so far seem ready to tolerate only minimal discomfort, which does not quite speak to the significance of the many, many crises we face.

Perhaps more people than Reznicek and Montoya will eventually find the motivation. However, it does not necessarily require a willingness to submit to lawful arrest and harsh punishments. It helps to remember that would-be saboteurs must be willing to *risk* arrest and harsh punishment, but they do not have to *plan* on it the way many activists do by striving to make their arrest a performance, such as those who lock themselves to a fence outside the White House. The civil disobedience playbook is being rewritten as we speak in the face of business-as-usual rules that destroy the foundations of life on Earth. Sabotage can occur in the dark and saboteurs can remain uncaught. Indeed, if one wants to accomplish something, one shouldn't follow the example of Roger Hallam, who announced *beforehand* that he would fly drones into Heathrow Airport to protest its expansion, which produced the predictable result of him being apprehended before the action took place.

As the movement gets stronger, it will need to wrestle with the forces of state repression, even if it sticks to nonviolent tactics: in August 2018, for example, a "kayaktivist" paddling in the vicinity of a pipeline in Louisiana was handcuffed by private security and thrown into jail with a felony charge and a potential punishment of five years in prison. Laws with heavy penalties for protesting against pipelines made their way through more than a dozen US states during the Trump era. During the "Autumn Uprising" of 2019, the London police banned all protests under the XR flag. Criminalization of nonviolent climate protests is coming. If militancy increases the amount and severity of prison sentences to a harmful degree, that would indicate a negative radical flank effect has occurred. If criminalization of activism spreads anyway, regardless of what the movement is doing, then we will face the same tough choices that so many movements before us faced: Should we back down? Or should we continue to fight, diversify our tactics and strategies, combine underground and aboveground work? Either way, we can be sure that love-bombing the police with flowers is not a useful way to advance the cause.

Indigenous Resistance

The Standing Rock camps are one of the many examples of the Indigenous- led resistance blossoming across North America in recent years. In many ways, Indigenous-led struggles can be seen as leading the climate movement in the region right now. But it is important to understand that these struggles are not only—or even mainly—about the climate. At Standing Rock, protesters railed against extraction and pipeline leaks, but the movement's heart was about treaty rights and addressing the history of colonization. Pipeline battles are part of a wider movement of Indigenous people seeking to reinstate their traditions and reclaim their rights to access and manage the land that was stolen from them and colonized, and that today is being destroyed in the most egregious ways. The history of Indigenous land defense is deep and fierce, spanning the continents. The movements harken back to traditions and relationships with land that have been suppressed by colonization and genocide; point out the fallacies of exploiting the earth solely for profit; and involve Indigenous people and others putting their bodies on the line to defend the earth.

These struggles are a key part of the climate movement (it is the history of colonization and capitalism that fuels the climate crisis, after all!), and it is crucial for non-Indigenous protesters to understand this context when they show up at pipeline blockades. It would also behoove the climate movement to take more cues from Indigenous activists, who today are protesting not only pipelines but also destructive lithium mining for electric car batteries: a stark reminder that proposed climate solutions must be considered from many perspectives if we don't want to repeat injustices of the past.

Learning from Mistakes: Extinction Rebellion in London

When tens of thousands of activists are engaged in lawbreaking, some errors are to be expected. During its two-week-long "Autumn Uprising," XR had approximately thirty thousand people out on the streets of London to create a maximum level of annoyance and disturbance. In the middle of it

all, a mistake was made. Given the great participation numbers, perhaps a mistake was unavoidable, but the aftermath was not.

In the morning rush hours of October 17, 2019, a group of XR activists entered the London Underground and light rail system to stop traffic. Two of them brought a ladder into the Canning Town station in the eastern part of the city, placed it against a train, climbed onto the roof, and unfolded a banner reading “Business as Usual = DEATH.” Commuters on the platform were first baffled and then furious. The commuters appeared to have belonged to the city’s largest non-white working class; in the many videos circulating afterward, one voice can be heard shouting, “I need to get to work, I have to feed my kids.” The crowd surged toward the train, screaming for the activists to come down. One commuter—incidentally a Black man, in blue jeans and a plain beanie—tried to climb onto the roof, at which point one of the activists—incidentally a white man, in a suit and tie—aimed a hard kick at his head. To summarize, a white man, in a high position, kicked a Black man below him. The white man was then dragged down onto the platform and set upon. Causing an uproar in the city, the incident marked a humbling defeat for the so-called uprising, and instigated a public conversation not about the climate but about racial injustice.

What constituted this as the stupidest action ever undertaken by the climate movement in the global North, however, was the response by XR London, home of the global Rebellion. It had the opportunity to wash its hands of the men on the train, but instead the official statement approved the kick to the head as an act of “self-defense.” XR excused the activists’ actions by pointing to their social roles and responsibilities—“they were a grandfather, an ex-Buddhist teacher, a vicar, and a former GP among others”—and defended the action as one that was planned “within Extinction Rebellion’s principles and values, centered around non-violence and compassion.” One of the cofounders went on BBC to bless the action as “peaceful” and “non-violent.” Others in XR London—a majority, according to one poll—fiercely opposed the group’s official position. Given the amount of self-policing inside the movement, as well as the international reach of XR’s tactical principles, however, we have to ask how this mistake occurred. Three factors are immediately apparent.

First, the strategy of XR has been to wreak generalized (but nonviolent!) havoc on the urban fabric, in the belief that this will force politicians to respond adequately to the climate crisis. This is, they believe,

how change happens. In this framework, the fossil economy is understood as being similar to an autocracy, an all-controlling government system. This is a categorical mistake that gives license to targeting pretty much anything for disruption. And thus we have the fantastic blunder of stopping an underground train. An equivalent scenario would be if activists in the civil rights movement had blocked the entrance to a Black Baptist church in Alabama, or Egyptian revolutionaries had marched away from Tahrir Square to attack an opposition newspaper. This self-defeat did not take aim at working-class emissions, but rather at working-class non-emissions. As everyone knows, public transport is part of the climate solution, not part of the problem—as the commuters at Canning Town heatedly pointed out. That climate activists got it in their heads to attack public transport shows that mistakes can be made on a grand scale.

The second factor regarding how this action was approved has to do with race and class. XR has remained aloof from these issues, and because it does not address them head on, it remains composed mainly of white and middle-class members with no viewpoint other than their own. The general sense and language of XR have dripped with a kind of sanctity and smugness—or, as one newspaper columnist quipped, “Why do so many XR occupations look like an audience in search of the National Theater? And why would an XR campaigner think it persuasive to tweet: ‘We are engineers. We are lawyers. We are doctors. We are everyone’?”

Unlike other branches of the climate movement, XR does not call capitalism itself into question, nor class and race issues. It is as if it’s trying to replace one cohort of politicians with another, a cohort that is open-eyed and true to science, so that life as we know it can continue. To bring about that outcome, XR trusts in the conclusion from Chenoweth and Stephan that we must corral a certain percentage of the population into the streets—3.5 percent is the figure making the rounds. This requires putting a stop to any finger-pointing or rich people–bashing that might alienate wealthier supporters. And so the Rebellion has positioned itself as “beyond politics,” neither left nor right, affirming police as much as ordinary citizens, even pandering to the concerns of conservative groups: “If you believe,” says one XR information video, “in people’s right to property and if you believe that the state should keep order and safety for people, then you also now have to be against the impacts of catastrophic climate change.” The right should, therefore, be won over, not confronted.

The problem with this, of course, is that “the right to property”—particularly the rights the wealthy can buy to extract and sell fossil fuels as they please—is what must be broken. And governments that keep this right-to-property status quo in place are standing in the way. Looking at it from whatever angle you prefer, be it in terms of investment, production, or consumption, it is the rich that drive the climate emergency, and a climate movement that does not want to eat the rich, in light of the literal hunger of those struggling to put food on the table, will never hit home. A movement that refuses to acknowledge and wrestle with the conflicting interests of the rich and poor will end up on the wrong side of the tracks. That is a recipe for alienating exactly the people who have the least to gain from continued business-as-usual. A climate movement without mass social anger will not gain the required striking capacity, and it shouldn’t have any difficulties making the argument that the rich are to blame—indeed, some Yellow Vests in France have touted the slogan “More ice sheets, fewer bankers.” Not only do the rich make our lives miserable, they are working to terminate the lives of multitudes. Here is another dimension in which the movement needs a radical flank: those who dare to speak the name of the enemy.

The third factor regarding the XR London action and subsequent response has to do with violence. When XR did eventually engage in violence, it did not target police or private property, but rather a Black man on his way to work. Can this really be seen as completely accidental? We have no doubt that if an XR activist kicked a cop in the head, they would have immediately and profusely apologized to all police officers. Pacifism has perhaps never existed in a real sense. What exists is the ability, or not, to distinguish between different forms of violence. What makes pacifism peculiar is that it gives its followers a sense of self-righteousness, which springs from the worship of one type of tactic—without acknowledging that pacifism, like any other tactic, is useful only sometimes. If pacifism remains the dominant form of protest, then it will ensure that the climate movement remains, at best, the distant, well-mannered cousin of social revolt in the 2020s.

Here is a point of contrast from a different movement in late 2019: Chilean students reacted to the rise in public transport fares—championing that mode of transportation as something that should be free and accessible for all—by organizing mass trespassing through the turnstiles; attacking ticket machines, supermarkets, and company headquarters; and touching off

a nationwide uprising against soaring inequalities. Meanwhile, the movement against the climate catastrophe remains calm and composed. The crucial strategic task before us is to marry the Chilean-style actions with the current climate struggle.

The failure of XR to do so, however, does not minimize its very considerable achievements: in the UK in particular, the two civil disobedience campaigns of 2019 massively shifted the national political conversation. They did more to press home the climate emergency than a thousand academic papers. Toward the end of the year, public concern about the crisis had reached unheard-of levels, and both the House of Commons and the European Parliament had given in to one XR demand—officially declaring a climate emergency—although, not surprisingly, without enacting any actual policies that might address the emergency head on. But what was perhaps most awesome about XR was the sheer speed of its development, speed now being the most essential element of climate action. XR was able to gain massive momentum at a critical time, and it is completely possible the organization can reflect on its past mistakes and learn from them. Learning the next steps might come fast too.

If the movement actually considers another set of tactics, then it might well turn to property destruction and other forms of violence. But it also shouldn't get stuck in the rut of thinking that sabotage is the only way forward. The tactic with the greatest potential for this movement might be something different. It might be the climate camp. During my time writing this book, the Swedish government has been focused on an application it received from the energy company Swedegas to pump gas into the country. The decision came in the morning: against all expectations, the government turned Swedegas down, in its explanation referring directly to recent protests that had camped and marched on the proposed terminal. We won. It's another one of the small wins so crucial for this movement, although it might still be overturned, just as the victory over Key-stone XL was. Also, a far-right government seems likely in the near future for Sweden. But every break, every little intermission in business-as-usual is a reminder that a world—not another world, this world—might still be possible.

The Climate Camp Model

Climate camps have a way of building on each other, spreading horizontally, stacking up experiences and wisdom about how to fight fossil money on the ground. Unlike Occupy Wall Street and similar camps that cropped up in 2011, climate camps are planned long in advance, with fixed dates for construction and dismantling. They are not spontaneous or reactive, but feed into a movement's planned escalation. Ende Gelände has now raised the stakes against German fossil capital for fifty years, along the way forming groups of foreign activists that return to their home countries and organize their own camps. And even as other groups form, Ende Gelände has continued to draw in larger numbers and outmaneuver the police. But such success can be hard to repeat elsewhere.

Smaller climate camps than Germany's, in other parts of Europe, have found that pre-announcing a camp can give the corporations time to prepare and remove enough fuel and equipment to cushion against a blockade. Then, with the corporations having anticipated the potential clash, the police may be able to blunt the edge of the protest action by standing to the side and letting it pass. We've heard of some chatter in the movement about combining camps with smaller, secret ones to launch surprise attacks that cause real disruption. Whatever comes out of it, the climate camp is the unrivaled laboratory for learning how to fight this fight.

Anyone who has visited a climate camp will have had a taste of the scene: the slimy porridges served after the gong is struck in the morning, the rotating peeling of onion, the food shipments miraculously appearing on the railroad tracks. A climate camp is its own distinctive brew of the new and the old—the metallic buzz from a drone filming for the three-minute clip that is later spread on social media, above wooden outhouses that are emptied by volunteers. Activists spin on stationary bikes to charge their laptops. Singing, chanting, they fill nets with hay to make cushions for pressing through police cordons and protecting against pepper spray.

The camp residents are a mix of people including youth, seasoned hippies, tattooed muscular folk, students, workers in and out of jobs, antifascists, mothers with kids in tow—everyone looking a degree shabbier than in their daily lives, just like at a music festival.

Affinity groups of like-minded activists are formed in drawn-out meetings. Delegates are sent to general meetings and return to share information and gather opinions; more often than not, the process is frustratingly time-consuming. The next training session is announced

through a “human microphone,” in which a crowd repeats in unison the words of a single speaker. On the fields, columns of activists line up with the flags of their “finger”—gold, red, silver, pink—and practice breaking through or passing obstacles. This form of nonviolence has a militaristic quality to it: the officers are positioned right behind the front banners, communicating with the command through headphones, with the “infantry” following behind. Contingency plans are formed for different scenarios, and scouts report movements of the police and the target situation. Names of lawyers and phone numbers of the legal team are scribbled on arms (no one here wants to get arrested). All of this to the sound of tinkling paint spray cans, which in this case are used to adorn people’s coveralls with the logo of two crossed hammers. Someone struggles to fix in place a banner with the words, “Put up a FUCKING fight for what you LOVE.” It has the silhouette of a ponytailed girl kicking a smoking chimney.

And then, in the morning, we march off, in the hundreds or thousands, bags packed, torches flaring, the chants set to a steady beat—“Who shut shit down? We shut shit down!”—and hours later, inevitably, we reach the mine, the tracks, the terminal. Sometimes, as we hold our positions around a complex of power plants, we can see the smoke from the chimneys thin out. It dies down. And then it is gone.

Chapter 3: Discussion Questions

1. This chapter is called “Breaking the Spell.” What is the “spell” (or “spells”) that the author thinks needs to be broken, and why?
2. How would you define violence? Would your definition include harm against living beings as well as harm against lifeless objects?
3. What is the distinction the author makes between violence against property and violence against living things? Between violence and terrorism? Describe why these differences make sense to you, or why they don’t.
4. Define the “radical flank effect” the author describes. How would you describe the relationship between the moderates and the radical flank of the climate movement: cooperative, antagonistic, strategic, counterproductive—or something else?

CHAPTER 4

FIGHTING DESPAIR

If you are thinking, or if you know someone who is thinking, that both protest and resistance seem futile and pointless in the face of the climate emergency, there is always an alternative ready at hand: we can give up on humanity and on this planet. This approach already has its supporters. Roy Scranton is one of them, whose claim to fame is a book called *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, followed by *We're Doomed. Now What?* He is adamant that "we're fucked." It's too late already—"too late to stop apocalyptic global warming"; we have "passed the point where we could have done anything about it"; we are "already over the cliff" and now stare into the chasm of "endless, depthless, unassuageable human suffering." It "ends in disaster, no matter what." All that is left is learning to die. But exactly who or what needs to learn to die is somewhat doubtful: Scranton slides between the individual, civilization, capitalist civilization, and the human species. It is hard for him to ever clarify who or what he is referring to.

What is never in doubt, however, is the futility of protest and resistance: Scranton's writings are full of disdain for collective action. He describes the hopeless feeling of marching alongside four hundred thousand others in the People's Climate March in New York City in 2014—which he considered a

waste of time showcasing “climate activism’s political impotence” and soothing the masses with “a false sense of hope.” There is no way a movement can get its hands around fossil fuel combustion and control it. “No matter how many people take to the streets in massive marches or in direct actions,” he says, the energy industry is beyond reach, because people “do not help produce it. They only consume.”

You would think that the movement would have silenced this quitter talk by now, but Scranton has maintained his prominence through the third climate cycle. In a June 2019 essay published in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, he takes McKibben and David Wallace-Wells, author of *The Uninhabitable Earth*, to task for suggesting that action might still avoid the worst-case scenarios. He announces that “only the deluded and naïve could maintain that non-violent protest politics is much more than ritualized wishful thinking.” Well, what else, then, should be done? For one brief moment, Scranton seems to flirt with the idea of moving past pacifism —“the real reason that non-violence is considered to be a virtue in the powerless is that the powerful do not want to see their lives or property threatened”—only to come down firmly against such action.

Instead, he says, we should cross our legs in a lotus position and meditate. On the way down, meditation can give us peace of mind. “If the news we must confront is that we’re all gonna die, then the wisdom that might help us deal with that news arises from the realization that it was going to happen anyway.” If the self can only understand that “it was already dying, already dead,” then it can crash to the bottom with calm; if it can also understand that everything around it is fleeting and insubstantial—a speck of dust in the cosmos, to be blown away in a millisecond—it can quietly let go of the world. It won’t hurt much. Activists have thus far longed for the world to be saved; the point, however, is to accept its end. The highest stage of consciousness, according to Scranton, is “willing our fate,” and action against the climate crisis blocks the way to such serenity. “With every protest chant,” Scranton bemoans, “we become weaker thinkers.” We should rather practice “detachment,” halt “our participation in social life,” and accustom “our souls to death.”

How can this message be acceptable to his reading audience? Most probably because it offers an explanation of why business-as-usual feels so distressing in the midst of climate breakdown—and gives people an excuse not to change their habits. To Scranton, his sense of his own personal

failings reveals the rest of humanity's. "I'm a bad environmentalist," he writes, which means that he cannot control his own acts of pollution. Scranton drives for hours on end, flies "all the time," throws cups away, binges on beef and tuna from "the worst places." "I know it's wrong, but I do it anyway." Scranton cites himself as a source of information about the ruling class. The odds are zero that "I, personally, will ever be able to do anything to stop or even slow down global climate change … You're heating up the planet. We do it every day. We can't stop … The problem is us." Struggle would be possible if an enemy could be identified, but "global warming offers no visible foe," no one to fight, only the ceaselessly corrupt culprit that is "ourselves." And since he cannot even bring himself to put the paper cups in the right bin, well then, he concludes, we all must be doomed.

A person with a strong, lifelong commitment to resistance would have a different position on the climate crisis. Even Scranton's conflicted soul and intellect can't hold back the radical leanings of his youth—he occasionally lashes out against capitalism toward the end of *We're Doomed*, and even calls for a socialist revolution—but in the end, he reaches for the comfort of the Stoics and the Buddha. His main creed is to resign himself before the inevitable collapse.

Climate Fatalism

If this was just one person's view, we wouldn't be talking about it, but Scranton shares this position with Jonathan Franzen, an even more famous American writer and novelist. From his platform in the *New Yorker*, Franzen has held forth on how unwise it is to attempt to stop climate change. Like Scranton, he believes that "planetary overheating is a done deal." As his evidence, Franzen points to the fact that "no head of state has ever made a commitment to leaving any carbon in the ground." But it's interesting to note that before the 1790s, no head of state had ever made a commitment to freeing African slaves. Prior to August 1791—when the Haitian Revolution proved that slaves could rise up and free themselves—someone of Franzen's type could have argued that, because no slave rebellions had yet succeeded, slavery would be doomed to last forever. For

Franzen the novelist, the fact that emissions have continued to rise over the past three decades proves that they cannot be cut—a common fallacy every struggle has to deal with. (In this line of thinking, because something hasn't happened yet means it won't ever happen.) He considers the current lack of progress and points to two options: you can feel ever more "enraged by the world's inaction; or you can accept that disaster is coming." He would not advise feeling enraged.

Franzen, like Scranton, feels shame about his driving and flying. He distrusts his own ability to cut back on his own emissions or to contribute to the wider struggle. But he believes that being guilty like this is just baked into the species: "Human beings are killers of the natural world," he writes. And human nature, he argues, is not going to change.

Because he finds himself at such a dead end, "what makes moral sense" to Franzen is "to live the life I was given"—that is, to go on living the life of a privileged, prosperous American intellectual. Franzen says he is aware of the seriousness of the climate catastrophe, as does Scranton, who believes that it is "bigger than World War II, bigger than racism, sexism, inequality, slavery, the Holocaust, the end of nature, the Sixth Extinction, famine, war, and plague all put together." And he does acknowledge that we can and must begin adapting to the crisis we've created. But despite his belief that humans have always been "brilliant adapters" and "climate change is just the same old story writ larger," he doesn't allow that we have the power to stop adding to the crisis. He can only imagine surrender. And his advice to the world? Be like me, go on living the life you were given, to the best of your ability. There's no point trying to change.

We might think that this position—call it climate fatalism—only belongs to a certain type of American elite looking out over a planet above 415 ppm. But that would be incorrect. It is older and wider than that. After COP15 in 2009, novelist Paul Kingsnorth, writing for the Dark Mountain Project, laid out the collective's core beliefs: the unraveling of civilization is unstoppable, the ecological crisis is uncontainable, and collective action against either is a wild-goose chase. He found a Swedish follower in David Jonstad, a notable intellectual of the first cycle's direct-action groups. Jonstad, who now believes that it's all over, retreated into the countryside to establish a farm for himself and his family and learn to hunt. He wrote his first book on carbon rationing as a solution to the crisis, his second book on

the inevitability of collapse, and his third on the virtues of a self-sufficient household. The paths to cave in and hide from the emergency are many.

What appears to unite the climate fatalists, at least on the surface, is a kind of worship of despair. That is understandable, certainly, as an emotional response to the crisis, but does not provide a foundation for a helpful political response. As another climate philosopher, Catriona McKinnon, has argued in her article “Climate Change: Against Despair”—a delightfully logical takedown of the fatalist position—it often comes down to a probability assessment. Some climate fatalists say that it would be technically (and politically) impossible to cut our emissions to zero and then begin the work of repair and regeneration. But the more common objection is a vague sense that we can’t address climate change because that’s just the way the world is. Scranton at one point acknowledges that it could be accomplished, if we managed to “radically reorient all human economic and social production, a task that is scarcely imaginable, much less possible. It would demand centralized control of key economic sectors, massive government investment in carbon capture, and global coordination on a scale never seen before”—a scenario that can be imagined in some hazy corner of the mind but is deemed impossible to be realized or even promoted in the real world. By deciding ahead of time that the situation is just too difficult for humanity to handle, the climate fatalist turns improbability into impossibility. In doing so, they reject any political solution. Why?

If someone decides to take action to influence the world, it is because they have a preferred outcome they want to make happen. Whether you’re trying to win a game, advocating to change a policy, or taking over a coal mine, you act because you have decided you want one option over another. If people only bet on the outcome with the highest probability of happening, then they’d have no real reason to act to make a different outcome happen. Whatever they bet on, it already has the momentum to continue toward its foregone conclusion, with or without help. Taking these highest-probability bets means simply going with the flow, carried along by the biggest wave.

To act politically, however, means to act not according to probability assessments but on what you think should happen. The alarming aspect of climate fatalism is that by advocating that people do nothing, writers like Franzen and Scranton not only give up themselves, but seek to influence others to do so as well. If giving up in despair was as certain an outcome as

the sun rising each day, there would be no need to push people down that path. This makes climate fatalism a self-fulfilling prophecy: it doesn't just point out certain probabilities but rather actively pushes for those probabilities.

McKinnon points out the danger in such a view: "That which is repeatedly asserted to be impossible thereby becomes impossible." The more people who tell us that a radical reorientation is "scarcely imaginable," the less imaginable it will actually be. If you are resting in the fact that nothing can be done, well, nothing *will* be done.

Imagination is a pivotal factor here. The climate crisis is unfolding within a series of interlocked absurdities:

- that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism;
- that it is easier to imagine a planned, large-scale, high-tech intervention in the climate system (often called "geoengineering") than it is to imagine a change in our economic system;
- that it is easier, at least for some, to imagine learning to die than learning to fight; and
- that it is easier to resign oneself to the end of everything one holds dear than it is to imagine considering militant acts and resistance.

Climate fatalism does all in its power to prop up these paralyzing absurdities. That is climate fatalism's job. Even where it stems from people's shortcomings and weaknesses, it is no less absurd: as McKinnon shows, if a person cannot muster the will to reduce their own emissions, this in itself does not establish the fact that they are unable to do so. Roy Scranton may not have enough motivation to pick a different selection from the menu than the bloodiest steak, but he *could* do it, in the sense that if he were to try "and not give up"—the crucial factor—he would "tend to succeed." Basically, the reason for despair here is that "I can make no difference because I am unwilling to make a difference." The same goes, of course, for every person responsible for luxury emissions. A climate fatalist of the Scranton–Franzen type then projects their own weakness onto society, raising a person's inability to change the established order to being a universal fact. It is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is for me to skip a filet mignon steak. Really?

The fatalist might counter that they have doubts about reducing personal emissions not not because they reject what's possible, but because they grasp the futility of personal actions. Me refusing that steak wouldn't have any impact on an atmosphere that is already clogged with billions of gigatons of carbon. This, however, McKinnon points out, is but a version of a classic philosophical paradox, namely: if one grain of sand is removed from a pile, this will not destroy the pile; if another grain is removed, the pile is still there, and so on, until nothing is left. Translating the paradox to the climate fight, my flight today between Houston and London makes no difference with regard to the total amount of emissions; nor did the flight I took last week; and if this is true of my flights, then it must be true of everyone else's flights and other emissions-producing acts, and so we end at the conclusion that climate change is not human-caused, but rather is just a thing, in and of itself.

Of course, that conclusion is absurd. We know climate change is caused by humans, but it's more complicated than just being the result of combined individual actions. As we've seen, fossil fuel investments, government subsidies, and other funds are poured into the industry to keep it afloat. By this point, we know that individual changes in consumption are not the only actions we can take. If climate change has been caused by a series of large-scale decisions and actions, then it can be countered by collective actions offsetting those large-scale decisions and actions. What has been disassembled could, in principle, be reassembled.

Some people may accept that argument, but feel that it's already too late. This is the supposed scientific case for climate fatalism: because so much has already been emitted, whatever cuts we make now and going forward will make too little difference to justify the massive hassle and effort required. The problem is that this case has no basis in the science. "It is not a question of whether we can limit warming but whether we choose to do so," to quote a 2019 peer-reviewed report on the state of the climate. "The precise level of future warming," says another, "depends largely on fossil fuel infrastructure that has not yet been built." That infrastructure could be blocked. All of the science looking at climate change through the lens of accumulation runs contrary to the principles of fatalism. Every gigaton matters, every single refinery and terminal and pipeline and SUV and superyacht makes a difference to the total damage done, and this is just as true today, when we're above 415 ppm and 1°C of heating, as it was a

few years ago when we were at 350 ppm and 0.5°C. It won't lose its truth at 500 ppm or 2°C or even higher. Global heating will always be a function of global emissions—less emissions, less heating. The incredibly alarming positive feedback loops and other climate mechanisms do not cancel out this function, they only add to it. David Wallace-Wells has the science behind him when he writes: "The fight is, definitely, not yet lost—in fact will never be lost, so long as we avoid extinction, because however warm the planet gets, it will always be the case that the decade that follows could contain more suffering or less." The fatalists have misunderstood the basics of both climate science and the goals of the climate movement.

No part of the movement is so naive as to think that global heating can still be avoided. It gets its urgency and rage from the knowledge that it is happening, that too much damage has already been done—as expressed in the very names of the groups: 350.org, Extinction Rebellion, Ende Gelände (which means "Here and No Further")—and that no effort should now be spared in preventing even more damage. The movement is aware that it faces a huge salvaging operation: safeguarding as much space as possible on this scarred planet for human and all other life to survive and maybe thrive, and then, in the best-case scenario, healing some of the wounds from the past centuries. A demand such as stopping all new fossil fuel infrastructure is just as important when CO_2 concentrations and temperatures rise.

In fact, it is much *more* important the later in the day it gets. As emissions rise, we will need to enforce the ban on new infrastructure by any means necessary. Overshooting our emissions targets again and again is a call for more resistance, not less. Until business-as-usual is a distant memory, as long as humans are around, resistance is the path to survival in all situations. It didn't become obsolete in 2009, and it won't in 2029 either.

A protest against climate change at London's Heathrow Airport, 2007. The banner shows the many effects of climate change around the world.

No one knows how this crisis will end. No scientist, activist, novelist, guru, or prophet knows that, because far too many variables of human actions will determine the outcome. If groups throw themselves into action with enough force, we can stop the march toward peak suffering, and might be able to repair some of what has already been damaged. No outcome can be guaranteed, but the options are simple: one either acts or one does not. Like each grain of sand added to the pile, an individual joining the movement will grow its capacity —to such a magnitude that the movement could get the better of the enemy. No more is required to maintain a minimum of hope: success is neither certain nor probable, but possible. "The context for hope is radical uncertainty," writes McKinnon. "Anything could happen, and whether we act or not has everything to do with it." Rebecca Solnit writes, "Hope is not a door, but a sense that there might be a door somewhere." Or more to the point, "Hope is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency."

Practice Your Ability to Hope

What do you think civilization might look like if it no longer relies on fossil fuels and the pursuit of profit over the health of the earth? Imagine what might change, and what might stay the same. What principles do you hope would guide this renewed civilization?

Can We Really Win?

People wielding that axe have always been told that we're doomed, we should just try to scrape by, nothing will ever change for the better—this goes for enslaved people, for the Jews facing Nazi concentration camps, and for countless other examples from history—every revolt has been discouraged by elders counseling defeatism. But consider the revolts that actually failed. Do they validate the defeatists? Fatalism and strategic pacifism both look at defeated struggles of the past with contempt: if someone raised a weapon and lost, it was because they raised that weapon. They shouldn't have. Chenoweth and Stephan chide the Palestinians for having used rocks and Molotov cocktails in their resistance; if they had only managed to stay peaceful—if the leadership had been able to "convince youths to stop throwing rocks"—they would have won the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Such arrogant thinking tends to come from outside the struggle, and disregards the sense of duty that causes people to fight with whatever they have available.

This thinking is often linked to another theory, called "just war theory," which while not strictly pacifist, puts strict rules on when violence is acceptable. One of its tenets goes like this: resistance is only justified if it is

likely to be successful. A victim has no right to fight back if they are doomed in advance, because it's "useless violence." This theory can have chilling consequences. Take World War II, where many Jews resisted and rose up against the Nazis. Often, they knew they wouldn't win because they were simply too outnumbered and out-gunned. That was the case in the Warsaw ghetto uprising in 1943. For a month, Jews in Warsaw grabbed what guns they could and fought back, before they were beaten and carried off to concentration camps. If we think of the uprising in terms of just war theory, they didn't make any military gains, and knew they would be crushed no matter what. But should they have let themselves meekly be carried off to die in the camps? Of course not.

The same argument can also be made today in the case of climate change. Imagine that it really is too late. We're over the cliff. Apocalyptic heating is going to happen no matter what. While science says that's still not true yet, it can't be ruled out entirely: it's all too imaginable to picture Earth becoming like a runaway train, where positive feedback loops drive the planet into uncontrollable heating. Surely it must be pointless to resist then?

Imagine for a moment that you can speak to the people in that future: desperate bands of what's left of humanity, crowded up at the North and South poles, barely surviving. Maybe their children have a chance, but it's not likely. What would you want to tell them? That we brought about the end of the world without a fight? That we lined up obediently to die? Or would you want to be able to tell them that some people fought as the Jews did, even though defeat seemed inevitable?

In the book *Revolutionary Yiddishland*, Alain Brossat and Sylvie Klingberg tell the story of how the Jewish resistance worked to hold on to their humanity in the face of unfathomable evil. Fighting for their lives was all that made sense, even if it only meant choosing when and where they died. They did it for everyone who would come after: "This affirmation of life by way of a sacrifice and combat with no prospect of victory is a tragic paradox that can only be understood as an act of faith in history," they write. The very hopelessness of it made it noble. The rebels affirmed life over and over, grandly and robustly, when they knew death was certain, and still they fought on. It can never, ever be too late for that gesture. As the revolutionary Emiliano Zapata said: "It is better to die on your feet than it is

to live on your knees”—better to fight with the life you have than passively wait for the earth to become unlivable.

Of course, we will hope it never comes to that. If we resist the fatalist voices saying we should just give up now, it might not come to that. Yes, some ecological tipping points have almost certainly been crossed; a certain amount of warming and loss is locked in. But that only highlights the need for emergency tactics. And if more tipping points are crossed, that need rises further still, until, in the worst case, the time comes to fight, just as the Warsaw ghetto rebels did.

In the time we live in now, when there is still hope to turn things around, we should honor past struggles—including those that have been defeated—rather than sneer at them. This is true for all the reasons above, but also for one more: defeat can teach us something.

If the failures of early waves of the climate movement taught us about the need for mass action, then the failures of the current climate movement could teach us about the need for sabotage. Climate fatalism is a luxury for the rich and jaded. In a memorable section of *We’re Doomed*, Scranton talks to Timothy Morton, another guilt-filled writer and emitter, who has found his reason to give up: He realizes that “OMG, I am the destruction,” and believes the trick is to find enjoyment in the moment, the same way that “eventually a nightmare can become so horrible that you start laughing.” You won’t hear anything like that in Dominica, or the Philippines, or Mozambique. You won’t hear poor people today who are actually at risk of dying in the catastrophe say, “I am the destruction. I may as well laugh at it.” In places where dying from climate change is a reality, choosing to give up just doesn’t ring true.

Every pacifist activist, every entrepreneur who thinks geoengineering and renewable energy alone will solve the crisis, everyone who works only on a single issue without seeing the bigger picture, every politician who chooses bad compromises over meaningful change—none of them are as harmful as climate fatalists, the rich white men who say, “We’re doomed, so let’s just die in peace.”

The Insidious Anticivilization Argument

There is, though, one more option for climate fatalists, the ones who have given up on humanity but might not be quite ready to die in peace, and that is to trim our population down and go back in time. This is the "anti-civilization" stance, which holds that human civilization got us into this mess, and therefore human civilization needs to be broken up completely. This usually means going back to hunting and gathering, throwing out agriculture, renewable energy, cities, schools, and most people as well: cutting the population from 8 billion down to 500 million or so. This philosophy carries some pretty horrific assumptions in its ideology and, when pushed to its logical conclusions, unravels into genocidal beliefs, ableism, eugenics, and fascism.

Despite these red flags, the group Deep Green Resistance, which published a book by the same name, has continued advancing the philosophy to the current day, and gathered a following of climate fatalists and movement purists. They start from a place of despair and hopelessness, but try to use hopelessness itself to inspire action. "It is our prediction that there will be no mass movement," the authors contend. Later in the book, they ask, "Are you willing to set aside your last, fierce dream of that brave uprising of millions strong?" This is an unabashedly elitist stance. They consider it enough to recruit one out of a hundred thousand people, as long as those "warriors" are of spotless character—"better to have a reliable few than an unstable more." These valiant few pursue a mission to undo human civilization as it has developed since the Ice Age. They advocate attacks not at targeted sites, but everywhere: bridges, tunnels, banks, factories, the electrical grid, the internet. They even call for "immediately taking down every cell phone tower in the world." They're also not against murder, writing that "uniquely valuable individuals make uniquely valuable targets for assassination." Their aim is to "induce widespread industrial collapse, beyond any economic or political systems." All told, a few years of war should be enough to cut CO_2 emissions by 90 percent, according to this militaristic, hierarchical, and deeply individualistic proposal.

One would hope that the climate movement has learned to steer well clear of this kind of thinking. But as despair grows, there is also the chance these fever dreams will look more appealing. It is an option the climate movement must ever be on the lookout for, especially when toying with the idea of moving beyond strict pacifism. The movement can inoculate itself against such thinking by emphasizing the inverse of the anticivilization

stance: whereas they want to wage war against civilization and indeed against humanity as such, this movement fights for the possibility of civilization, in the sense of organized social life for *Homo sapiens*. Yes, our civilization's reliance on, and basis in, fossil fuels must be torn down, but only so that another form of civilization has the chance to endure.

This means building alliances not only within the climate movement, but with other movements fighting capitalism in all the places it does harm. A movement that notes the interconnectedness of the problems we face could lead to a society-wide reorganization, not only of our reliance on carbon, but in our economies and cultures, and in how we relate to each other and value each other. Racism, sexism, wars, borders, colonization, and exploitation in all its forms—these are all part of the same structure holding up the extreme division of wealth and power that lets this crisis continue.

Do We Need More Than Just Sabotage?

While we've recounted the three major waves of climate activism, we've left out many parts of the wider environmental movement that began decades before the words "climate change" came to mean all that they do today. Some notable influences, each of which could be the subject of a separate book, include Rachel Carson's landmark book on the effects of toxic chemicals, *Silent Spring*, the emergence of environmental justice, Indigenous movements to reclaim land and culture, the struggle against nuclear proliferation, the timber wars over logging in the forests of the Pacific Northwest, and the push to preserve the planet's diversity of plants and animals.

All these previous struggles had an important influence on the way the climate movement emerged, but one is especially useful to highlight when thinking about strategic sabotage. Peaking in the 1990s, a number of groups and networks arose to fight for animal rights and environmental rights and against logging and extraction. Three groups in particular gained fame and notoriety: Earth First! (EF!), the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), and the Earth Liberation Front (ELF). Together, they carried out the greatest number of eco-sabotage actions in recent history.

Between 1973 and 2010, these groups and other associated individuals and groups carried out 27,100 actions. They used a mix of legal and illegal approaches, combining marches with direct action, hunger strikes, and what became known as “monkey wrenching” or “ecotage”—property destruction in defense of the climate. They sprayed graffiti, slashed tires, burned vehicles, smashed windows, glued locks, threw explosive bombs and sound bombs, released caged animals, and yes, blew up pipelines. Actions tended to be carefully chosen for their message: targets included Chevron stations, Hummer dealers, banks, GMO research offices, and a ski resort threatening a lynx habitat.

Significantly, 99.9 percent of those actions caused zero injury. This was deliberate: as one action alert for an arson ran, “Houses were checked for all forms of life, and we even moved a propane tank out of the house all the way across the street just because, in the worst-case scenario, the firefighters could get hurt.” These actions show that property destruction can be done (and has been done recently!) without violence against people. But for the most part, these groups weren’t tackling climate issues. Although the large-scale climate movement was also growing during these years, the movements were moving on separate tracks.

From a strategic point of view, the sabotage carried out by EF!, the ALF, and the ELF may have been too much too soon. While the climate movement has become a mass movement with no sabotage, they were a sabotage movement without the masses. And as the nonviolent climate movement picked up speed, the monkey wrenchers were being infiltrated and brutally suppressed by the FBI. Without a larger movement to lean on for support, they became victims of new terrorism laws that put many people in solitary confinement for decades, shattered trust among others, and stopped the movement in its tracks. (These same laws are now haunting the climate movement and set the precedent for Jessica Reznicek’s long sentence.) Seeing this suppression was likely part of the early climate movement’s decision to remain so strictly nonviolent.

But now, looking back from our vantage point in the 2020s, it has become apparent that both the sabotage-only and mass action–only movements have failed to meet their goals so far. The mass movement needs a more militant wing, but more militant groups also need mass movements behind them. Without the larger movement, each small act of sabotage can be written off, separated from the larger picture. And jumping

directly to sabotage without mass buy-in is more likely to scare people than prod them to action—and place the saboteurs in the way of fierce repression without popular support.

So how can a militant climate struggle avoid the pitfalls of earlier movements, whose actions were not connected to the larger movement or to the collective imagination? First, the setup for actions should be done carefully. Instead of waging war from separate silos with little popular support, the movement should carefully connect with others. Targets should be selected purposefully, not spur of the moment or at random. Further, they should target things that are obviously crucial to the way of life that is dependent on fossil fuels, such as luxury emissions.

Similar to earlier revolutions, when physical attacks on the ruling classes were only a small part of the struggle to change society, climate militancy also must understand its place in the wider anticapitalist movement. Success or failure will not hang on a single act of sabotage, and the time it takes to build a groundswell of support is as important as the time it takes to plan the logistics of a dead-of-night action.

There also needs to be a recognition from both pacifists and non-pacifists that the movement is fighting the same fight. “Diversity of tactics” is an idea that has grown in the past few years of racial justice struggles. It is the premise that if individuals within the movement can find common cause, then different tactics can be respected. That does not mean having a blank slate for doing whatever one wishes, whenever one wants; strategy is still important, as is a clear view of history. But, for all we plan, we are still in the end facing the unknown together. It would be good to be mindful that success can come from the most unexpected places.

How can this all be accomplished? The only way is through practice, practice, practice.

Here and No Further

In 2016, Ende Gelände targeted the mine and railroad tracks around what was known as the Schwarze Pumpe, an enormous power plant in the eastern German region of Lusatia. It runs on brown coal, and belches out volcanic columns of smoke from chimneys. Fuel is brought from the nearby mega-

mine via railroad tracks. Up until the year of action, Schwarze Pumpe and four similar facilities in Germany had been the property of Vattenfall, an energy corporation owned by the Swedish government and thus subject to its control. In Sweden's parliamentary elections of 2014, Gustav Fridolin, leader of the Green Party, kept a lump of coal in his pocket. Wherever he went, in every speech and televised debate, he waved that lump of coal and promised, with stern determination in his voice, to put a lid on the coal in the ground. The CO_2 emissions produced by Vattenfall's brown coal mines in Germany were one-third greater than the total from all of Sweden; no single measure would do more to cut emissions than closing those dirty mines.

That is what Fridolin and the Greens pledged to do if they were elected to power. Well, they were elected, and two years later, Schwarze Pumpe and the other four facilities were slated to no longer be in Sweden's possession. But they were going to be sold to a group of capitalist investors from the Czech Republic—including the country's richest man—craving more resources for the brown coal revival in which they invested. Sweden's government, controlled by democrats and the environ-mentalist green party, had chosen not to close some of the greatest coal riches of the continent, but to throw them straight into the jaws of fossil capital.

Meanwhile, up on the railroad tracks, with no cars running, the blockade was in full effect, and my affinity group was itching for more. We wanted to press on. So did hundreds of others in white overalls, holding snap assemblies and banding together for a maneuver not planned in advance or agreed upon by the whole group. We marched away from the tracks, toward the power plant itself. In the patch of forest surrounding the plant, we encountered a fence. Upon reaching it at a half-walking, half-running pace, my affinity group in the front tore it down, broke it apart, stomped on it, and continued with the rest of the march up to the perimeter of the plant. There we encountered another, sturdier fence, which we also pulled down. The few private guards were caught unawares and were completely outnumbered, so we rushed into the compound. During my years in the climate movement, I have never felt a greater rush of exhilaration: for one pulsing, mind-expanding moment, we had a piece of the world's infrastructure that was wrecking the planet in our hands. We could do with it as we wanted. We streamed through the area, as amazed as the guards that we had actually entered and had no plans for how to

proceed; we checked some gates here, entered a tower there, sprayed a slogan in a corner, unsure of how to complete the shutdown, until police forces arrived and chased us away with their batons and tear gas. We returned to the circle of blockaders. The morning after, Vattenfall declared that Ende Gelände had forced the suspension of all electricity production, something that had never before happened at a fossil-fueled power plant in Europe.

Corporate executives, politicians, the media were all aghast. “It’s a completely new phenomenon when violent pressure is used to shut off production and directly intervene in the German energy system,” said the CEO of Vattenfall’s European operations. He complained of a “trail of devastation” and referred to the destruction of the fences as *massiven kriminellen Gewalttaten*, “massive criminal violence.” This phrase was repeated by the town’s mayor, who declared that “you cannot imagine any worse damage than what these people did. One of the main arguments for this region and for the Schwarze Pumpe industrial park is: we are industry-friendly. This nullifies the image we try to establish with investors.” (Less than a year later, the new Czech owners shelved their plans for expanding the mine serving Schwarze Pumpe and another pit as well, citing adverse political developments; Ende Gelände claimed partial victory.) Civil disobedience ceases to be legitimate “when things are destroyed,” one public broadcaster said in denunciation of the action. Gustav Fridolin called it “illegal.”

Ende Gelände protest at the Welzow Süd open pit mine, May 2016.

The incident of the stormed compound took on a life of its own, as a sign of the supposed violent nature of Ende Gelände in eastern Germany. It brought home more absurdities of the situation: the breaking of fences could be officially framed as unimaginable damage, *massiven kriminellen Gewalttaten*, whereas the constant cloud of CO_2 from Schwarze Pumpe was the mark of a peaceful, normal life. These absurd distortions had something to do with the political makeup in those eastern districts, the main bastions of support for Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the far-right party that denies climate, loves coal, and wants to scrape every last bit from the bottom of the mines. No one was more furious about the action than AfD. In the hours that followed, a mob of far-right activists and locals assaulted several of the Ende Gelände blockades, shooting firecrackers into them and chasing activists in cars. More violence of that kind should perhaps be

anticipated in the future, as the task of defending fossil wealth is passed on to the far right in Europe and elsewhere across the globe.

But if destroying fences was an act of violence, it was violence of the sweetest kind. I was energized for weeks afterward. All the despair of the climate breakdown was out of my system, if only temporarily; I had experienced an injection of collective empowerment. There is a famous line in the anticolonialist fighter and theorist Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* where he describes violence as a "cleansing force." It frees the person "from despair and inaction; it makes them fearless and restores their self-respect." Few things produce as much despair as global heating. Imagine that, someday, the built-up sense of despair—especially in the global South—finds an outlet. We've had a period of peaceful Gandhian climate movements; perhaps the time is right for adding a more militant Fanonian one to the mix. One day soon, the breaking of fences may be seen as a lesser crime than destroying a planet.

Chapter 4: Discussion Questions

1. Why does Malm argue that climate fatalism is "dangerous"?
2. Why are hope and imagination so important, according to Malm, for social movements? Why does he say it is crucial for the climate movement?

FIND OUT MORE

Youth-Led Organizations and Movements

Fridays for Future (fridaysforfuture.org) Just Stop Oil (juststopoil.org)
Power Shift Network (powershift.org)
Sunrise Movement (sunrisemovement.org)

Books

Dunbar-Ortiz,Roxanne.*An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People*. Beacon Press, 2019.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. *A Time to Break Silence: The Essential Works of Martin Luther King, Jr., for Students*. Beacon Press, 2013.

Klein, Naomi. *How to Change Everything: The Young Human's Guide to Protecting the Planet and Each Other*, adapted by Rebecca Stefoff. Atheneum, 2021.

Maddrell, Grace, ed. *Tomorrow Is Too Late: An International Youth Manifesto for Climate Justice*. The Indigo Press, 2021.

Nakate, Vanessa. *A Bigger Picture: My Fight to Bring a New African Voice to the Climate Crisis*. Mariner Books, 2021.

Sigwalt, Dany. *This Book Will Save the Planet: A Climate-Justice Primer for Activists and Changemakers*. Frances Lincoln, 2022.

Thunberg, Greta. *No One Is Too Small to Make a Difference*. Penguin, 2019.

Zinn, Howard. *A Young People's History of the United States*, adapted by Rebecca Stefoff. Triangle Square/Seven Stories Press, 2009.

WRITING PROMPTS AND GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you imagine a future without fossil fuels might look like? What might be possible then that isn't now? How would we live together differently, work differently, have and use things differently?

2. What skills do you have, or what skills do you want to learn, to bring to the climate movement?

3. David Wallace-Wells describes climate change as the stage upon which all other challenges will take place; as the biggest threat to human life on the planet; as a problem of a different category and scale. When you think about the future, what do you think about climate change? What do you want to learn and practice now to prepare for that demanding future?

4. Malm talks a lot about despair. Do you feel despair thinking about climate change? If so, how do you move past it? Are there methods or stories that motivate you to keep going? What do you think of Malm's arguments on this topic?

5. Malm doesn’t talk much about other struggles happening at the same time as the climate movement: the movements against structural racism, against fascism, for gender equality, for queer acceptance, against the prison system, for free movement across borders, for the return of land to Indigenous people … and yet all of these struggles are deeply linked to the climate crisis and the climate movement. How do you see these different problems affecting each other, and how could the movements around each of them be more united? Do you know of places where they already are?

6. What steps are you taking right now, or could you be taking right now, to help the climate movement? What would you need to do more? Are there people around you with similar visions? Brainstorm how you could work together, what you might focus on, what skills and support and knowledge you have, and what you still need.

IMAGE CREDITS

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p. 72 The WSPU meeting. Posted to flicker by the Women’s Library Collection at the London School of Economics. Public domain. The archival description reads, “An unidentified woman speaking at the London Pavilion, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and Christabel

Pankhurst also on the platform, with representatives of WSPU branches behind."

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